New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1944

Volume V, Number 16. • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of September 4, 1944

1944 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1943 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGES
Another Love Story	260, 261, 262
*Carmen Jones	207, 208, 209
Connecticut Yankee (A)	219, 220, 221, 222
Doctors Disagree	186, 187, 188
Early to Bed	314, 315, 316
Harriet	364, 365, 366
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358
Listen, Professor	190, 191, 192
Lovers and Friends	210, 211, 212
Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303
*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
*One Touch of Venus	264, 265, 266
Othello	256, 257, 258
Outrageous Fortune	237, 238, 239
Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
South Pacific	184, 185, 186
Three's a Family	328, 329, 330
Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
Victory Belles	244, 245, 246
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199, 200, 201, 202
What's Up	229, 230, 231
Winged Victory	216, 217, 218, 219
Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

1942 Vol.

Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126
Janie	244, 245, 246
Rosalinda	187, 188, 189

1941 Vol.

*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457, 458, 459

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 4, 1944.*

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

All Reviews reprinted by permission.

1944 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1944

Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
According to Law	179
Allah Be Praised	207
*Anna Lucasta	143
Bright Boy	249
But Not Goodbye	220
Career Angel	184
*Catherine Was Great	154
Cherry Orchard (The)	276
*Chicken Every Sunday	232
Decision	265
Dream With Music	188
Duke in Darkness (The)	279
*Follow the Girls	222
For Keeps	169
Good Morning Corporal	152
Helen Goes to Troy	201
Hickory Stick	190
Highland Fling (A)	198
House in Paris (The)	241
Jackpot	284
*Jacobowsky and the Colonel	243
Love on Leave	162
*Lower North	146
*Mexican Hayride	271
Mrs. January and Mr. Ex	235
Mrs. Kimball Presents	254
Only the Heart	230
Over Twenty-One	297
Peepshow	263
*Pick-Up Girl	196
Pretty Little Parlor	212
Public Relations	228
Ramshackle Inn	295
Right Next to Broadway	256
*School for Brides	156
*Searching Wind (The)	217
Sheppey	209
*Sleep No More	142
Slightly Scandalous	172
*Song of Norway	149
Storm Operation	289
Strange Play (A)	179
Suds in Your Eye	287
Take a Bow	167
Take It As It Comes	261
*Ten Little Indians	160
Thank You, Svoboda	251
That Old Devil	177
Wallflower	274

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 4, 1944.*

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Lower North"
"Anna Lucasta"
"Sleep No More"
"Song of Norway"
"School for Brides"
"Catherine Was Great"
"Good Morning Corporal"

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"Sleep No More"

Farce by Lee Loeb and Arthur Strawn; staged by Cledge Roberts; settings by A. A. Ostrander. Presented by Clyde Elliott at the Cort Theatre, August 31, 1944.

NEW YORK POST
September 1, 1944

'Sleep No More' a Machine-Made Farce at the Cort, Full of Yawns

By WILELLA WALDORF

ONCE UPON A TIME, nearly twenty years ago, Robert Armstrong and James Gleason appeared on Broadway in a farce called "Is Zat So." As we recall it, Mr. Armstrong played a pugilist. Mr. Gleason was his manager. Every two or three minutes during the performance one of them would push his face into the other's and snarl, "Is zat so?" The answer invariably was, "Yes, zat's so?"

For some obscure reason this sent audiences into gales of laughter. It ran for over a year on Broadway and another year in London. Mr. Armstrong, who has been in the movies ever since, has apparently been pining away for the theatre all these years. He returned last night in a new farce entitled "Sleep No More," at the Cort Theatre.

That's What It's Called

We say a "new farce" because that's what the program calls it. Actually there is nothing new about it. Earnest hacks have been turning out dreary variations of the same formula for so long that everybody in the audience last night must have been at least two yawns ahead all the way.

Mr. Armstrong plays H. Clifford Gates, a get-rich-quick promoter who's always trying to put over wacky inventions guaranteed to grow hair overnight, make synthetic rubber out of old nutmeg gratings or wash clothes without soap or water. The handcuffs are reaching for his wrists when a youthful hick from Indiana turns up with a pill that makes it possible for human beings to go indefinitely without sleep.

The youth proceeds to demonstrate by staying awake for six days and five hours, whereupon orders pour in from all over the world, and H. Clifford Gates and his associates from the barber shop move into swanky offices and begin to talk in terms of millions.

It was, of course, inevitable that sleep should suddenly overcome the pill's inventor at a climactic moment in the second act. Unfortunately, this reviewer, having taken no pill, was overcome long before that.

NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE
September 1, 1944

And So to Bed

By HOWARD BARNES

REVERSE English has been employed on a bedroom farce in "Sleep No More." The new comedy at the Cort explores the possibilities of a pill which will keep people perennially out of the boudoir. It still does not fail to make numerous allusions to one of the primary instincts of the human race. Sometimes they are amusing. More often they are merely suggestive. The presence of that wheel-horse of cinema acting, Robert Armstrong, in the leading role does not make the piece the witty what-not which the authors undoubtedly intended it to be.

* * *

For Lee Loeb and Arthur Strawn have thought up a cute idea for their comedy and then let it die aborning. Their barber-shop characters, who want to make some fancy new financial arrangements by exploiting an invention, are solid enough to have emerged as truly satirical figures instead of the drab and depressed promoters you will find in the latter stanzas of "Sleep No More." The terror of a mattress manufacturer when he discovers that people need no more shut-eye, might have made a fine fulcrum for the plot, but it is tossed away in a flurry of slapstick.

* * *

It seems hardly necessary at this point to tell you that everything is neatly resolved at the Cort. The smart boys are taken for a ride when their sleepless wonder takes a long snooze, but they manage to cash in on their devious schemes, while the pill discoverer and his manicurist lady love are left as happy as they have any right to be in the proceedings. The con men demand and deserve whatever sympathy is to be expended on a shabby show.

* * *

Armstrong discloses himself as a far better actor than a judge of plays in "Sleep No More." As the arch-promoter who tries to put over non-sleeping on the public, he has all the stock gestures and artful reading of lines that make for good comic acting on the stage, but he is left holding his head in his hands. Patricia Ryan is properly naive as the manicurist who falls for the inventive druggist and George Offerman jr. is right enough as the chap who decides to do away with bedtime. The others in the company give a stuttering interpretation of a sorry script. "Sleep No More" has a central situation which inspires laughter, but it has been treated in a yawning manner.

THE CAST

George Slater.....Raymond Bramley
Smithers.....John (Skins) Miller
Harry Foster.....John Kane
Diana Clark.....Patricia Ryan
Millie Jenkins.....Louise Larabee
H. Clifford Gates.....Robert Armstrong
Mr. Riley.....Len Hollister
William J. Brown.....George Offerman Jr.
Detective Sergt. Krump...G. Swayne Gordon
Mrs. Ridgeway.....Doris Underwood
Oscar Ridgeway.....Gerard Martin
Laura.....Mary Hull
Mr. McClellan.....Horace Cooper
John B. Timmons.....Ed Latimer
Mailman.....Louis Cruger

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 8, 1944

'Sleep No More' Is a Noisy Farce Which Fails to Be Funny Enough

By JOHN CHAPMAN

YOU can't be funny just by hollering all the time. Or just by rushing around. Or by clutching people's arms and saying, "I've got it!" Or by stretching one small get-rich-quick idea into three acts. Or by combining all these methods. Which foregoing lecture is a preamble to the report that "Sleep No More," which opened last night at the Cort, isn't funny enough.

I laughed twice—once when a fantastic hair-growing machine exploded on a barber-shop customer, and again when John "Skins" Miller, a movie comedian who looks like the poorest of all Bowery bums, confessed vociferously to a super-criminal past and then added that he told it in strictest confidence.

Two laughs aren't enough and I'm sorry about it, for the people involved in this Lee Loeb-Arthur Strawn play are ready, willing and able. Robert Armstrong, movie veteran whose last appearance here was in "Is Zat So," is vigorous and likable as a high-pressure promoter of the Wallingford type—but the Wallingford type is sort of old now.

George Offerman Jr. and Patricia Ryan are pleasant in their young-love roles. Ed Latimer briefly displays skill as a mattress tycoon, and Raymond Bramley, G. Swayne Gordon and others nobly strive to help in what everybody fondly hopes is the hilarity.

The plot concerns a lad who has invented a pill which takes the place of sleep—which means that everybody can go on working and playing 24 hours a day. The lad takes his pills to promoter Armstrong, who builds a fabulous business before he discovers the pellets aren't any good.

All of the actors worked so hard last night that I got tired. That's sympathy for you.

NEW YORK TIMES
September 1, 1944

Murdered Sleep

By LEWIS NICHOLS

OF dubious farces there seems no end—although, of course, after Labor Day it may be different. Into the Cort Theatre, which had a full share before, there came last evening the latest in the series, "Sleep No More." Like many another in recent seasons, and no doubt back through history, it tries to pretend that turbulence is humor, and wit is arrived at by the constant reiteration of a couple of jokes. Barring one or two lines of dialogue, the Lee Loeb and Arthur Strawn play is not very funny, and no track work or other forms of athletics by a panting cast can persuade anyone otherwise.

The substance is this: A promoter, who has tried to back various intricate devices, finds a young man who has invented a pill—called Sleep No More—making sleep unnecessary. Money starts rolling in, and the patent is about to be sold, when it develops there simply is no substitute for hard-earned slumber. Midway in the second act one of the characters remarks that "the ministers are against Sleep No More; they say that if no one sleeps, there will be more drinking." At the end of that act last night certain of the less-sedate members of the audience went away, no doubt to test the theory. Those who remained saw Robert Armstrong, long away from the stage, completing a part which no one could save.

NEW YORK SUN
September 1, 1944

'Sleep No More,' Sad Little Gimcrack, Has Its Premiere at the Cort

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE houseboards at the Cort, which reluctantly reopened last night, call the theater's new play "the wacky mirth-quake" and perhaps that is sufficient to give you the general idea. The play bears the title, "Sleep No More," and it's just about as bad as anything you've ever seen.

This frantic and dismaying little number is from out of the West, come to Broadway following engagements in Cleveland and Detroit, and it's the work of two writers new to the local stage—Lee Loeb and Arthur Strawn. Clyde Elliott courageously bills himself as the producer.

The piece is energetically played by Robert Armstrong, returning after an absence of nearly twenty years, and some clamorous associates, all of whom should have known better. They go banging about the stage of the Cort, in scenery by A. A. Ostrander, and stay with the play through three acts, which are mercifully over by 10:40 P.M.

"Sleep No More," if you're still awake, concerns a young genius from Indiana who invents a pill that makes sleep unnecessary, puts himself and the pill in the hands of a

promoter, one H. Clifford Gates, and then proceeds to fall asleep just as they're about to sell out for a cool three million.

Those in last night's audience at the Cort were asking themselves, "How do such plays get produced? What sort of pills do play backers take? Did the backers of this play read the script—or can they read?"

"Sleep No More" is a sad little gimcrack. Surely nothing more banal will come Broadway's way this season.

And so much for the month of August, theatrically. It's now written into the records.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 1, 1944

Sleep No More Runs in Grade B Groove

By BURTON RASCOE

SLEEP NO MORE, a farce by Lee Loeb and Arthur Strawn, which opened at the Cort last night, is variation No. 769 of the Get Rich Quick Wallingford formula, with numerous gags right out of the well-thumbed card files for the ingredients of Grade B movie slapstick. All I can say is that if you like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing you like. Last night there must have been 10 or 12 people who found it intermittently funny.

For myself the only pleasure I took in it was that of feasting my eyes on the beauty of two girls—Patricia Ryan and Louise Larrabee—who are mixed up in the frantic scurryings about the stage which constitute the plot development of this farce. Both are new to Broadway. Miss Ryan from radio and Miss Larrabee from stock in California. Miss Larrabee resembles Gertrude Lawrence and has some of Miss Lawrence's pert and restless energy. Miss Ryan is one of the most appealing ingenues I have seen in a long time; sweet, lovely and talented, who can act with her voice and eyes.

The pathological swindler in this piece has for a phone number a barber's shop, the three tonsorialists of which he has gypped out of their small savings for an electric machine guaranteed to grow hair and a machine for washing and ironing shirts instantaneously. The hair-growing machine, (right out of the Olson and Johnson inferno) clapped upon the head of a baldheaded customer, proceeds to give him the jerks; it sputters, explodes and nearly electrocuted the comic.

That's the high spot of the first act. The inspiration of the authors seems to have exhausted itself after the cerebration required for that gag. The next two acts have to do with the felonious acquisition and exploitation of a pill that is supposed to make sleep unnecessary, enabling people to work and play 24 hours a day, with no bad physical effects. The inventor of the chemical formula of the pill, using himself as the guinea pig to test the pill's effectiveness. . . . Pardon my yawn. Where was I? . . . Oh, yes! . . . He is mistaken in believing the pills keep him awake; punctured ear drums are the cause of his insomnia.

Aren't you bored with all this? . . . Then there is a sheriff that is bound and gagged and tries to make himself heard throughout an act, and there is one of the barber partners in the fraud who excitedly steps into a wire wastebasket and can't get his foot out without taking off his shoe, and there is another barber partner who thinks his wife is unfaithful to him, and, on being asked if he is worried she won't come back when he reports her missing, says "No, I'm afraid she will," and stuff like that. This much you can say for the show; it's pretty clean. Sorry I can't say any more for it.

Robert Armstrong, the famous vis-a-vis of Jimmie Gleason in the highly successful farce, Is Zat So? heads a cast that does everything except get down on its hands and beg the audience for laughs.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 1, 1944

'Sleep No More' Presented at Cort

By ROBERT GARLAND

LAST NIGHT, at the Cort Theatre, Clyde Elliott presented "Sleep No More," "a new farce" by Lee Loeb and Arthur Strawn, with Robert Armstrong, George Offerman, Jr., and Patricia Ryan as featured players. The direction was by Cledge Roberts. The production was designed by A. A. Ostrander.

The cast, in the order of their first appearance, contained Raymond Bramley as George Slater; John "Skins" Miller as Smithers; John Kane as Harry Foster; Miss Ryan as Diana Clark; Louise Larabee as Millie Jenkins Brown; Doris Underwood as Mrs. Ridgeway; Gerald Martin as Oscar Ridgeway; G. Swayne Gordon as Detective Sergeant Krump; Louis Cruger as a mailman; Mary Hull as Laura; Horace Cooper as Mr. McClellan and Ed Latimer as John B. Timmons.

Mr. Gates' Offices

The first act took place in George's Barber Shop, morning. The second act took place in the "new" offices of H. Clifford Gates and Associates, several days later. The third and final act took place in the same locale as act two, next morning.

The scenery was built and painted by Acme Scenic Studios, Chicago. The lighting equipment was furnished by Century Lighting, Inc.

The special properties and effects were credited to Henry L. Gebhardt. The furniture came from the Rose Furniture Shop. The barber shop equipment was supplied by Joseph's Barber Supply. The carpet was provided by the New York Hotel and Theatre Carpet Co. The costumes were supervised by Anna Hill Johnstone. Miss Larabee's costumes and Miss Ryan's third act costumes were designed by Wilma.

Mr. Elliott's Staff

Clyde Elliott's staff consisted of Chandos Sweet, manager; Hal Oliver, press representative; Louis Cruger, stage manager; Gerard Martin, assistant stage manager; Charles Auburn, carpenter; William Hubbard, electrician, and Marshall Murray property master. The house physician was Dr. H. A. Coveler.

The Aerozonator Air Purifier and Soaperior Liquid Soap Dispensing System used in the Cort Theatre were made by the United States Sanitary Specialties Corp., New York and Chicago. The management was not responsible for personal apparel or property of patrons unless properly checked with the theatre attendant.

Patrons were advised, however, to take their coats and wraps with them whenever they left their seats. It is urged for the comfort and safety of all, that theatre patrons refrain from lighting matches in the theatre.

L'Envoi

The exit indicated by a red light and sign nearest to the seat you occupied was the shortest route to the street.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
September 1, 1944

They Call It a 'Mirthquake'

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

HAVING gone all the way back to Shakespeare for its title, Thursday night's little farce apparently decided to go almost as far back for a lot else. *Sleep No More* is another of those bang-bang jobs about fly-by-nights who get into a jam and turn the stage upside down trying to get out. This time the racket is a pill that enables folks to live without sleep. The racketeers' guinea pig stays awake for six days; but naturally, just as a $5,000,000 deal is being closed, he falls into a profound stupor, thereby joining large sections of the audience. There's lots more, of course, but we needn't take inventory.

Like so many similar farces, the present "mirthquake" is inventive, gymnastic, pandemonious, always on the move, always up-and-at-'em, with just one thing wrong: it's never funny. It's merely formula; and though Robert Armstrong and the rest of the cast do everything but hang by their feet from chandeliers it's to no avail.

"Anna Lucasta"

Play by Philip Yordan; staged by Harry Wagstaff Gribble; settings by Frederick Fox. Presented by John Wildberg at the Mansfield Theatre, August 30, 1944.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 31, 1944

'Anna Lucasta' Scores Again

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ONE sweltering night last June, *Anna Lucasta* played its first performance in a tiny Harlem basement; and though there were all kinds of things wrong with it, it was vivid and unusual theater. Wednesday night *Anna Lucasta* made its bow on Broadway, and though there were even more things wrong with it, it was vivid and unusual theater once again.

THE CAST

Katie	Theodora Smith
Stella	Rosetta LeNoire
Theresa	Georgia Burke
Stanley	John Proctor
Frank	Frederick O'Neal
Joe	George Randol
Noah	Alvin Childress
Eddie	Hubert Henry
Officer	Emory Richardson
Blanche	Alice Childress
Anna	Hilda Simms
Danny	Canada Lee
Lester	John Tate
Rudolf	Earle Hyman

Not that it remains the same play. It has been substantially rewritten, and its new faults are rather different from its old ones. It has now more the smell of the commercial theater about it. It has been pared of certain crudities, and purified of its worst extravagances and melodrama; but gone, too, is an emotion—however blind, however blundering—that struck at the tragic sense of life, that suggested the loneliness and perversity that inhere in all humanity. In their place is something that moves more straightforwardly on a stage, but that is also shallower and more stagebound and, at its worst, a rather shameless bid for laughs. If the new version has less sprawl, it has also less dimension. Yet, though artistically *Anna Lucasta* is now more than ever a bad play, and one with

less significance, it holds you both by its over-all quality of theater, and by many fragmentary scenes and colloquies that provide something fresh and alive. Beyond that, it offers some startling good acting. My guess is it will be a hit.

• • •

Though there are new motivations and a new ending, the general story is much the same. This is the tale of a beautiful Negro girl thrown out of the house by her father when he finds her rolling in the hay, and who becomes a street-walker in Brooklyn. It is also the story of her family, whose mercenary members, when they think they have found a well-heeled young sucker, bring her back to marry him; only for Anna and Rudolf (who is plenty smart) to fall in love. They marry, but afterwards Anna—fearing he will learn about her past—goes back to her old haunts. The old ending was tragic; the new one is happy.

One of the mishaps of the new version is that Anna no longer really dominates the action; that role has been usurped in good measure by the family. Yet the family is so interesting that this change need not have been for the worse; but though the family retains its flavor, it has lost much of its reality by being too much put to comic use. Scene after scene is pitched—and played—for laughs. Nor this time, as last, can the play get over the camel's hump of Anna's decision to leave Rudolf; once again we get an unconvincing scene, and this time — on Anna's part—a weaker motivation.

• • •

But though a bungled story, *Anna Lucasta* is full of exciting people. Anna herself, with her defensive toughness and perversity, has all the makings of a flesh-and-blood character. As Anna, Hilda Simms gave a more uneven performance than she did in Harlem, but at her best was very good indeed. Then there is Frank, Anna's bullying hulk of a brother-in-law, a blundering ox who thinks he is a crafty fox; the role is wonderfully performed by Frederick O'Neal. There is Blanche, a real slob of a street-walker, who is played superbly by Alice Childress. Other good roles are played by other good people, among them Canada Lee, Rosetta LeNoire and Georgia Burke.

• • •

One of the real merits, too, of *Anna Lucasta* is that it is a play, not about Negroes, but about people. The characters transcend their race and its special problems to become human creatures, to suggest anybody's family.

Mr. Gribble has directed the show with gusto, and concealed its length by smart pacing. The play remains, in essence, something that captures the spirit of the theater, even though it falls apart as drama, and commits almost every possible sin against art.

NEW YORK TIMES
August 31, 1944

"Anna Lucasta"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

PRECEDED by several million dollars' worth of good-will, "Anna Lucasta" moved down from Harlem last evening to prove again that it can give an exciting evening in the theatre. Between the hot June night when the American Negro Theatre gave it a first performance on 135th Street and a hot August night when John Wildberg offered it at the Mansfield, there have been a number of changes in script and cast. But the essential things have been retained—the qualities of character, and humor and pathos—and the structure of the play has been improved by editing and changes. And the acting is excellent.

• • •

Acted by a Negro cast and with a Negro setting, "Anna Lucasta" is not necessarily a Negro play as Broadway is accustomed to see them. There is none of the easy clowning which the Forties are accustomed to credit to Harlem, and there is no particular social content. Philip Yordan wrote it originally for white players, and in the translation his mood has been retained; the characters could be either Negro or white. In the direction, Harry Wagstaff Gribble also has stayed with the script, and beyond an occasional jarring costume or so, the entire staging has been sincerely anxious to keep away from what the sages say Broadway demands from that other theatre district to the north.

The story is vaguely like O'Neill's play about the other Anna—Christie. A prostitute, who had been thrown from a Pennsylvania home by her father, goes back from the Brooklyn waterfront dives into which she had fallen. She meets and marries a nice boy from the South, she hears her past exposed and again returns to the dives until her husband comes for her. The plot is simple, but Mr. Yordan has embellished it with some wonderful characters. The girl's family and in-laws are partly dubious crooks, willing to steal anything, and partly nice, simple people. One of the Brooklyn prostitutes, with hard face and slangy, ribald tongue, probably never will be beaten on the stage. The boy is easy, casual and humorous. Mr. Yordan has a human group.

• • •

While part of the play may be a bit talky, and purists might claim certain moments of confusion, no one ever will say anything bad about the acting. Hilda Simms, who played the title role in Harlem, has come downtown with the show; a beautiful young lady who also understands what can be done with a part. Frederick O'Neal again is the ponderous, faintly philosophic brother-in-law, and he is giving a magnificent performance. Alice Childress is the Brooklyn prostitute noted above, and Earle Hyman is the boy from the South. In a small role there also is Canada Lee, normally a star in his own right but helping out his friends this time and acting in the way that had made him a star.

The American Negro Theatre has been doing honest and energetic work for many months; Broadway owes it a considerable debt of thanks for discovering "Anna Lucasta" and taking the trip down Seventh Avenue.

NEW YORK SUN
August 31, 1944

'Anna Lucasta,' Done at Mansfield by All-Negro Cast, Uneven but Well Acted

By WARD MOREHOUSE

INTO the Mansfield Theater, which once belonged to De Lawd and the Angel Gabriel and the children of the fish fry and all the other folk of "The Green Pastures," there now comes another all-Negro play, "Anna Lucasta," brought down from Harlem by John Wildberg and given its first performance in 47th street last night.

It is an interesting but curiously uneven play. It combines skillful with clumsy playwriting, melodrama with broad comedy, and there is a little of everything in it—at times, too much of everything. There are some well drawn characters and excellent performances, notably those of Frederick O'Neal and Hilda Simms. What a compelling actor that man O'Neal is!

"Anna Lucasta" has undoubtedly been subjected to considerable tinkering and revision since its early summer presentations by the American Negro Theater. They've now given it a happy ending. Harry Wagstaff Gribble has again done the direction and six of the original players are in the roles they created. Frederick Fox has contributed realistic settings.

"Anna Lucasta" introduces a new playwright, Philip Yordan, who has a gift for characterization. Mr. Yordan writes of Anna and the Lucasta family, living in a small town in Pennsylvania. Anna, for two years a prostitute and plying her trade in the waterfront bars of Brooklyn, is brought back to Pennsylvania by the family to meet a country boy, Rudolf, who is up from Bessemer, Ala., with $800 and in quest of a wife. Rudolf, upon sight of Anna, goes all out for her and they're married. But on her wedding day she is driven out of the house and back to Brooklyn by her fanatical father. Rudolf follows and the final curtain falls on their reunion in Noah's bar—and on hope for them both.

The play is at its best when it is depicting the home life of the Lucastas. The scenes of house-hold squabbling and scheming to get the $800 from the boy from Alabam' are enormously amusing, and it's over these scenes that Frederick O'Neal, as the bully and general fixer, presides.

Hilda Simms, as the wayward Anna, is convincing and capable—an effective performance all the way. Canada Lee, an asset to any play, brings his vigorous playing to several scenes. There are spirited performances from Georgia Burke, Theodora Smith and Rosetta LeNoire and certainly a sensitive one from Earle Hyman as the country boy who has a mind of his own. Under Mr. Gribble's direction much of the play is now played for laughs and they got them last night at the Mansfield.

Put down "Anna Lucasta" as a creditable presentation of a spotty and uncertain play. Portions of it are far better than the play as a whole.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 31, 1944

Anna Lucasta Impresses as Significant Drama

By BURTON RASCOE

ANNA LUCASTA, a comedy-drama of Negro life by Philip Yordan, with an all-Negro cast, hung up a record of 11 curtain calls for the entire cast at the Mansfield last night. The players, functioning as a unit, refused to accept individual curtain calls. Had they done so, many in the audience would have been in the theater until after midnight; for it is certain that every one of the 14 actors would have been given signal honor and a few probably would have had to take from five to 10 calls each. The demonstration continued long after the theater lights had gone up. Excited groups gathered in huddles on the sidewalk to exchange thrills over the play.

In my opinion Anna Lucasta is the most important event in our native American drama in 20 years. It is not only top-notch theater, with some of the finest acting, both comedic and dramatic, that has ever been seen on Broadway, but is the first American play, designed for an all-Negro cast, to treat of Negro life without a certain amused condescension; the first play of Negro life to recognize the fact that Negroes are individuals with pretty much the same problems, ways of living, speech and points of view as the whites and not mere "quaint and lovable characters," or "laughing, carefree, easy-going," or "loose-living, immoral, gin-drinking, crap-shooting, dope-peddling and colorful."

Hailed with excited zeal in these columns when it was first put on by Harry Wagstaff Gribble at the American Negro Theater's tiny playhouse in Harlem, Anna Lucasta has been brought to Broadway by John Wilberg, who left the entire production in the hands of Mr. Gribble and, as an earnest of his good faith that he would not interfere, took a train to Montana and remained there until the curtain was ready to go up.

In bringing the play to Broadway, Mr. Gribble has slightly shifted the accent from pathos to comedy and thus has made it surer of a long run than as it was before. There are many more laughs in the play now and a few of them are perhaps a bit too calculated. But, on the other hand, Mr. Gribble has definitely strengthened the motivation of the play, removed the amateurish touches of arty symbolism of the original version, dropped a preposterous prologue and integrated the material throughout into a fast-moving comedy-drama.

The story tells of a Negro family in a

Pennsylvania industrial town, the coarser-grained members of which scheme to get hold of the money of a nephew who is being sent from a farm in Alabama up North for a wife, because poverty and illiteracy in the section have reduced the desirable young women about to zero. The only unmarried girl in the Lucasta family has been driven from home by a father who has the reverse of an Edipus complex, because of one misstep, and she has taken up the life of a part-time worker and part-time streetwalker on the waterfront of Brooklyn. The girl is induced to return home, where she first falls in with the scheme to mulct the lad. But the boy is not a clodhopper; he is a brilliant and personable agricultural school graduate. They fall in love at first sight. Her past confronts her on her wedding day and she, rather than face the boy's disillusion, goes back to her old life—until the boy finds and rescues her.

Old stuff, you may say; but you won't say it after you see the way it is done. It will thrill you as you have rarely been thrilled in the theater. Anna Lucasta reveals one of the very finest actors I have ever seen, bar none—Frederick O'Neal. He is simply magnificent; his characterization of a rhinoceros-hided, stupid, ill-mannered showoff, who imagines he is a forceful personality and a clever schemer, is so utterly perfect that you don't think of his acting the part at all—until you realize that, so great is his dramatic sense, so real and natural are his bits of technique, he could play Othello or Emperor Jones equally well.

But the others in this play are almost as sensationally good—particularly Hilda Simms, Rosetta LeNoire (who twice last night stopped the show), Alice Childress, Earle Hyman and Canada Lee. I name Mr. Lee last here, for I think that is the way he would want it to be. Because he thought the play so important, he asked for a minor part that had been vacated by one of the original players, and, fine actor that he is, he has submerged himself inconspicuously when he might easily have hogged several scenes. To those I have named, in especial, and to all the others in the cast, and to Mr. Gribble, I acknowledge my deepest gratitude for a memorable evening.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 31, 1944

Negro Players Splendid in 'Anna Lucasta,' a First-Rate Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

TOO often, a play which looks good in semi-pro or neighborhood surroundings—say the Blackfriars or the Provincetown—looks bad in a Broadway theatre. Not so with "Anna Lucasta," which, after an early Summer tryout in Harlem, came last night to the Mansfield. "Anna Lucasta" is a first-rate drama, acted by a company of Negro players who are a joy to watch.

I did not see the Harlem version, but have been told that some changes, like the elimination of a prologue, have been made. It is not yet perfect, for it is loosely and slowly written in two or three passages which need pace and punch—but these drawbacks are easily forgiven.

"Anna Lucasta" is another story of a prostitute who finds a decent love. It has been written with honesty, sympathy, humor and, often, more than ordinary grace by Philip Yordan. It just happens to be played by negroes, but it isn't about negroes; it's about people.

For All They're Worth

The actors of the American Negro Theatre play these people for all they are worth, which is considerable; and they do so with imagination and restraint. Hilda Simms, an extraordinarily pretty girl with a splendid voice, is admirably right as Anna Lucasta, the prostitute. Frederick O'Neal contributes a full-size "heavy" character, and the experienced Canada Lee plays a bouncing sailor and Brooklyn hackie as one would expect him to do it.

There are others in the company who have been around Broadway, like George Randol, who plays Anna's bitter, mad father, and Georgia Burke, who is the girl's simple, loving mother. And there are some in the company who haven't been around, like Earle Hyman, who gives a touching performance of the simple country lad who falls in love with Anna.

Hyman is a winner from John Golden's 1943 acting tournament. A girl making her first professional appearance, Alice Childress, gives a funny portrayal of a tattered Brooklyn tart, and her husband, Alvin Childress, is Noah, the sympathetic saloonkeeper.

Mr. Yordan's play concerns a Pennsylvania family which contains scoundrels as well as decent folk and which is about to be visited by a farm lad from down South. The boy, son of an old friend, has come north with $800 and hopes of finding a decent, God-fearing wife.

Boy Meets Trollop

The schemers of the tribe figure to get his money by marrying him to Anna, the outcast daughter, who has been plying an outcast's trade for two years, working out of Noah's Brooklyn saloon. Anna's father, who has an unbalanced hatred of the girl, is forced to go to Noah's place and bring her home.

The boy and the girl fall in love. He takes her at his own valuation and she, thinking she can live up to it, marries him. But no sooner is the wedding over—and here is a crucial scene which could have had more work—no sooner is the wedding over than the father drives Anna out again; drives her away from her husband and back to the saloon.

Here the boy finally finds her and the happy outcome, although it is quite a bit of sugar-coating, is not beyond reason.

Harry Wagstaff Gribble, who made the original Harlem production, has directed his company most expertly. But I do think he and Producer John Wildberg, with the author's help, could use a blue pencil—particularly in the opening and closing scenes.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 31, 1944

Tedious But Well Acted

By HOWARD BARNES

A SINGULARLY disagreeable family has populated the stage of the Mansfield. "Anna Lucasta," which started off as a folk fable about Polish emigrees and has found up as a Negro drama, poses several problems of purported "social significance," but they add up to very little in the way of theatrical magic. White or black, its tale of a prostitute who is regenerated by the love of a good man is hard to take at this late date. The players chop bits of vivid make-believe out of a haphazard woodpile of lines and situations. The production is far more professional than one might have expected from a show which tried out in Harlem early in the summer. For all of that, it is a tedious charade.

* * *

Whatever significance is to be found in the piece escaped this reviewer's notice in a big way. There is a Negro clan living in Pennsylvania. Hearing that a comparatively rich yokel from Alabama is coming to town in search of a wife, they hustle little lost sister back from a term on the Brooklyn waterfront with predatory dispatch. She falls in love with the fellow, of course, but skips back to the gin palaces when she hears that her somewhat checkered past is going to be exposed to the farmer.

* * *

It would have made little difference whether Philip Yordan had conceived a happy ending, as he has, or let the whole play thump for tragedy. He has not written with enough over-all perception or eloquence to make his drama stand the gaff of three long acts. There are fragments of scenes which are honest and even moving, with Hilda Simms, in the title role; Canada Lee, as a Brooklyn roustabout, and Earle Hyman, as the hayseed, bringing warmth and conviction to the passages. There is no sustaining interest in the piece aside from the brilliant characterizations.

* * *

The mere fact of putting a dreary theme in the hands of able Negro actors does not fulfill the latent promise in "Anna Lucasta." While Miss Simms gives a superb portrayal of the slut who goes straight and Lee and Hyman back her up valorously in the sprawling plot, it still sprawls. The acting warrants far better material. Alice Childress is excellent as a waterfront oldtimer; George Randol gives a curiously sinister stage portrait of the Negro father, and Frederick O'Neal is particularly animal-like as the avaricious brother-in-law who tries to sell his sister for a split on the dowry. Harry Wagstaff Gribble has kept the cast moving about. Frederick Fox has designed some agreeable settings. The production trimmings merely make "Anna Lucasta" pretentious. There are some fine actors in search of a play at the Mansfield.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 31, 1944

'Anna Lucasta' Opens at Mansfield

By ROBERT GARLAND

BIG news today. Good and big, believe me. Ever so often, some theatrical thing comes unexpectedly along to gladden the heart and to lift the spirit of the professional first-nighter. Such a theatrical thing is the "Anna Lucasta" which, under the solo producing banner of John Wildberg, is currently on view at the Mansfield Theatre. It all seems too good to be true; too true to be believable.

Frankly, though, it isn't!

A surprise package in the dizzy Broadway grabbag, "Anna Lucasta" is a prize parcel in which you come across a brand new playwright on whom to keep your eye, and a brand new player to name among the foremost, a sure and shining star to whom to hitch your theatregoing wagon. Her name is Hilda Simms. And, come peace or war, good plays or bad, she is a comely colored girl to give credit to her race.

And prestige to the theatre!

Down from Harlem

Some small time back, this very Hilda Simms was acting in another version of this very "Anna Lucasta" down in a Harlem basement. That basement was hot, as only a Harlem basement can be in high midsummer. The players were hot, nigh onto evaporation. And the audiences were hot; hotter, if possible, than the basement or the players. I can't remember just how anybody stood it.

Stand it they did, however.

Under the admiration, friendship and direction of Harry Wagstaff Gribble—remember "March Hares"?—the acting members of the American Negro Players got better, the dialogue of the Philip Yordan tragi-comedy got brighter, and the customers out in the sweltering auditorium got more numerous and enthusiastic. And Hilda Simms, the Anna of the title, got to be the piece's outstanding player.

Suddenly, success in Harlem!

Rudolf Gets Anna

Nowanights, in its downtown, revamped and Broadway-minded version, "Anna Lucasta" still has to do with a bad girl with a good heart whose fanatical father throws her, bag and baggage, out of his small-town Pennsylvania cottage. Following her inborn—I'm afraid! — yearning for Mrs. Warren's ancient and dishonorable profession, she finds her wayward way to the Brooklyn waterfront.

Noah's bar in Greenpernt.

There, she takes up with sailors — one Danny and another Lester! But, back home in Pennsylvania, a clean-cut chap called Rudolf

"Anna Lucasta"—continued

shows up from the agricultural colleges of the sunny South, $800 in his wallet and a yen for Anna in his better nature. Anna, who has been sent for and is now back home, first falls for his bankroll, then for him. Marriage, wedding veil and all.

Then tragedy. Then happy ending.

Cast Excellent

It isn't the story that makes "Anna Lucasta" the exciting theatre-going it most certainly is. That story is neither more nor less than the familiar boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boys gets girl, formula. But this time the basic situations are embellished by one touch of "Anna Christie," another touch of "You Can't Take It With You," and still another touch that is Playwright Yordan's own.

The result is fine tragi-comedy.

The cast makes much of it. Hilda Simms is beautiful, brash and brilliant as the good little bad girl. Frederick O'Neal is hard and happy as a nasty member of the Lucasta household. Earle Hyman is charmingly upstanding as the unyokel-like yokel who falls for Anna. And I think it is Alice Childress who is both fast and funny as a she that grew up in Brooklyn. Players and play fit wonderfully together. . . .

Anyway, "Anna Lucasta" looks like the town's new must-see. It is cheerful, very. It is tearful, enough. And definitely rugged. My friend Jack Wildberg has something here. And I mean something.

NEW YORK POST
August 31, 1944

'Anna Lucasta' No Great Shakes As a Play But the Acting Is Fine

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE American Negro Theatre, which produces plays in Harlem, is a progressive organization that we like to see getting along. Consequently it is encouraging when one of its productions and some of its foremost actors are given a chance to appear on Broadway. It is discouraging, however, to see what inevitably happens to a play from one of the city's workshop theatres when it is taken in hand by Times Square experts and revamped with a wary eye on the box office and possible movie rights.

"Anna Lucasta," Philip Yordan's work which we first encountered earlier in the summer at the little Library Theatre in 135th Street, moved down to the Mansfield in 47th Street last night. With it came some American Negro Theatre actors of unusual ability. Anyone who makes a pretense of keeping up with the theatre should not miss the performance of Hilda Simms, a striking new personality on Broadway, an actress apparently endowed with a natural feeling for the stage. She has poise, sensitivity and intelligence, and something even rarer in newcomers to the theatre—repose. Add to this a good voice and an uncommonly attractive face and figure and you have something worth a trip to the Mansfield.

Not very far behind is Frederick O'Neal, a character actor who happens to have a pretty good part in the decidedly uneven play that "Anna Lucasta" was, and is. Mr. O'Neal, too, is worth a trip to 47th Street, which makes two trips. There is also excellent playing by Georgia Burke, Rosetta LeNoire, Earle Hyman, Alice Childress and other members of the troupe, which even includes Canada Lee in a smaller than usual part.

Down from Harlem

We are putting the performances ahead of the play in reviewing "Anna Lucasta" because it is the performances that matter at the Mansfield. As a play "Anna Lucasta" has been greatly improved and slicked up in some respects since its somewhat ragged tryout in Harlem. In other respects it has been hooked-up, rendered more obvious and revamped to conform more closely to the regulation Broadway groove.

The Harlem prologue and epilogue—bringing in the war—have been eliminated with little sense of loss. And several scenes in Acts I and II have been rewritten and tightened to considerable advantage.

But the third act goes rapidly to pot and a happy ending that is also a sappy ending has lately been tacked on without the slightest regard for what might be termed artistic verisimilitude. "Anna Lucasta," though its earlier scenes are filled with gusty comedy, is essentially a tragedy—or was before Mr. Gribble, Mr. Wildberg and their backers got to tinkering with the script.

Mr. Gribble, as we understand it, did a good deal of labor on the play—written by Mr. Yordan as a drama about a Polish-American family in America—during its original Harlem run. He has now done even more, apparently. Some of it has removed a certain amateur quality and made the motivation a bit clearer. But the fundamental character of Anna herself has been completely changed.

Happy Ending Now

Anna Lucasta is now a nice girl who went a little wrong (but probably not wrong enough to disturb the Will Hays office), but meets a nice boy whom she loves and marries, only to have her nutty old father tell about her past. So she runs off again to her old haunts, but the nice boy follows her and a kindly barkeeper brings them together.

Anna used to be a trifle more complicated, and also more interesting, than that. A prostitute torn between two lives, eternally looking for something she never found, her inevitable end was suicide. Not on Broadway, though.

Miss Simms was thrown by the final trumped-up scene last night, and we don't wonder. Before the hokum ending, however, she was even better than we remember her in Harlem. Mr. O'Neal likewise came through magnificently as a Broadway actor.

The member of the troupe who suffers most from the move to 47th Street is Alice Childress, whose portrayal of the Brooklyn prostitute was one of the best things in the uptown production. Her final scene is still good, but they have built up an earlier appearance with some flimsy stuff about a stolen pair of binoculars that is overdone. Miss Childress dutifully overdoes it and it's all rather a pity.

See "Anna Lucasta" for some exciting acting, and for an occasional scene of genuine dramatic vitality and lusty comedy. But don't expect too much of the play. It's a choppy, disappointing job.

"Lower North"

Play by Martin Bidwell; staged by David Burton; settings by Raymond Sovey. Presented by Max J. Jelin at the Belasco Theatre, August 25, 1944.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 26, 1944

'Lower North' Premieres at the Belasco

By ROBERT GARLAND

DON'T believe everything you read in the papers. Especially about the theatre. For instance: Night before last when "Lower North" failed to open at the Belasco the story was that, at the final dress rehearsal, the scenery fell on the last act, ruining it completely. Frankly, I doubt it! After last night's postponed premiere in 44th St., I'm certain it was the other way around. The last act must surely have fallen on the scenery.

For "Lower North" is merely one more of those let's-write-a-comedy-about-the-Navy pieces that refuses flatly to come off, a conversation fest in which the humor isn't in the least bit funny and the pathos isn't ever anything but phoney. Plumb in the middle of the second act there's a diatribe by a supposedly war-shocked Marine which, delivered in a bawdy bar between two cheap and vulgar sequences, is pretty hard to take. Impossible, really!

THE CAST

Hank	Jerry Rand
Peterson	Frank Bradley
Sobieschyk	David Graham
Cochran	Dort Clark
Heath	Douglas Jones
Johnson	Dean King
Curley	Arthur Hunnicutt
Bruce	Robert Breton
Karnes	Eddie Waglin
Spadoni	Robert Myers
Jim	Kim Spalding
Pratzell	Rusty Lane
Phillips	Bob Lackaye
Barton	Charles Clancy
Mary	Sara Anderson
Johnny	John Farrell
Marine (Dress Blues)	Royal Rompel
Andy	Don Grusso
Frank	Phil Pine
Ruby	Blanche Faye
Pearl	Blanche Gladstone
Burks	Paul Ford
Marine Sergeant	John Conway
Mr. Hines (Traveling Salesman)	Watson White
Phyllis	Cora Smith
Dorothy	Flora Knight
Messenger	Mitchell Ahrons

Sheep in Uniform

If I'm wrong, don't write in and tell me. It doesn't really matter. But, as far as I remember, "Lower North" is concerned with a stage full of sheep in ship's clothing, bleating their unhappy heads off on the upper deck of a school building in a naval training station on a Saturday morning; in the Rendezvous Bar that evening; and in the cubicle called Lower North the following Sunday morning. A single day in the Navy takes a long time passing no given point.

And there is no given point in "Lower North." None that I can see. In the first act, the boys are going on leave. And what do you think they talk about? Girls! In the second act, the boys are on leave. And what do you think they talk about? Girls. In the third act, the boys are back from leave. And what do you think they talk about? Girls. They talk like wolves in ship's clothing. But they're ba-baa, just the same.

Some Salt, Please

Now I come to think about it, there's a sailor who can't get leave to see his wife before he sails away; a sailor whose brotherly love for another sailor is open to suspicion; a sailor whose sweethearts are his pony and his liquor; a sailor who just can't catch up on his sleeping; a sailor who speaks of Marines as "sea-going bell hops"; a sailor who is a CPO and as tough as all-get-out; a sailor who belongs to the you-all set of Texas; a sailor—

Oh, there's a slew of sailors at the Belasco. In the persons of Kim Spalding, Rusty Lane, Arthur Hunnicut, Robert Breton and the hard-

working rest of them, they're nice enough boys. But the playwright — Martin Bidwell who, taking him at his word, is reporting on the Navy as he found it—lets them down . . . With the good cast and Raymond Sovey's excellent scenery at the Belasco, it mightn't be a bad idea to revive "Sailor Beware." That, at least, was salty.

NEW YORK TIMES
August 26, 1944

Flat Shandygaff

By LEWIS NICHOLS

AFTER a Thursday postponement caused by suddenly collapsing scenery, "Lower North" finally opened last evening at the Belasco. It should receive due credit for surviving vicissitudes and near disasters, but the misfortune is that while it has fulfilled its obligations by going on, it isn't much of a show. For Martin Bidwell, who himself is in the Navy, has written a comedy-drama about his fellow-sailors which is not very funny on the one hand and pretty purple on the other. In his dialogue and action there is a constant dispute between the bar-room and the century of the common man which leaves neither winning; "confused" is the Forties' word for it.

Mr. Bidwell's people are students in the Quartermaster School. There is a Texan, a former CCC worker, a cowboy, men from all parts of the United States. The playwright is trying to say that in the service, and facing danger, the group forgets its various backgrounds to become one unit. Since, however, "Lower North" is a play, there must be a plot. Mr. Bidwell has reached into the grab-bag to find the one about the man who is going AWOL because his wife is about to have a baby, the one about the two sailors and the two girls, the one about the boy who admires one of his companions because the latter looks like the boy's flier brother. The language of "Lower North" is not able to cope with its worn and shiny situations.

Arthur Hunnicutt has perhaps the most amiable role, that of the former cowboy, while Kim Spalding must make what he can of the mariner who would have fled the Navy had his wife not stopped him. Rusty Lane has a blustering part as an officer with a 14k heart; Sara Anderson, Dort Clark, Douglas Jones and John Conway also are more or less important. David Burton directed, which must have been a fairly thankless job from the start.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 26, 1944

Stock Characters

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

THE Navy has a brush with the theater in "Lower North," the new comedy-drama at the Belasco, and neither are shown to best advantage. The play explores the emotions and personalities of a group of candidates for quartermaster rating as they bone up for exams, migrate to the local bar on liberty, and finally straighten out their tangled relations back in the barracks. But neither in their hell-raising nor in their idealizing do these characters show good and sufficient cause why they should be brought onto the stage and contemplated for the span of three acts. They are routine service types, only thinly veiled by comedy or drama. There are more interesting people and more interesting events to be found elsewhere, both in the Navy and in the theater.

• • •

A program note on the author, Martin Bidwell, states: "A Hollywood writer, this is his first play." The chief difficulty with Mr. Bidwell's approach to the theater seems to be that he comes to Broadway trailing clouds of Hollywood devices behind him. At almost every turn in his script there is something that smacks of the celluloid martial drama.

At first there is the usual business about the trainees who don't take the war seriously enough and must be moulded into real honest-to-goodness sailors. There follow other passages concerning the man who goes over the hill to be with his wife; the sailor whose girl marries a 4F; the marine from Guadalcanal who is hauled in to paraphrase, in a long speech, what Sherman said more effectively in three words; the homespun philosopher who sums up our war aims in corn-fed terminology. To top it all, the climax depends not upon inspired writing, but upon one of those telegrams starting "The War Department regrets to inform you . . ."

• • •

Most of the characters are as familiar as the incidents used to "reveal" them. Dort Clark appears in the most prominent role, that of a tough young lad who continually flies in the face of serious Navy regulations and his classmates' feelings; there are some laughs to be had out of this part, especially in the Act II bar-room scene, but generally it is so exaggerated that the actor cannot help overplaying it. Arthur Hunnicutt is bound by a one-dimensional caricature of a horse-loving Westerner. There is a tough C.P.O., a dreamy young lad whose brother is at the fighting front, an honor student who is almost undone by love, only to be saved by his comrades in the last reel; in short, "Lower North" includes almost all the stock characters you might expect to find around a minor make-believe barracks.

• • •

David Burton's direction has done nothing to cover up the naive quality of some of the incidents; at times it has even increased it, as in the case of the scene in which the sergeant from Guadalcanal enters the bar with a woe-begone look, grimacing and clenching his glass until even the sleepiest customer has long since realized that all is not well with this soldier. The producer, Max J. Jelin, has decorated the piece with three adequate settings and some authentic looking uniforms. One feels, however, that no Amount of effort could have brought the script to life. It has only a few laughs on its side, not enough to liven its monotonous restatement of themes that have long since passed into the "used" category.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 26, 1944

'Lower North,' About the War In a Navy School, Needs Punch

By JOHN CHAPMAN

OUT of his own experience in the navy Martin Bidwell has written "Lower North," about a bunch of men in a quarter-masters' training school in California. As personal experience it carries conviction; as drama it leaves one wishing very much that it could be better—wishing it with the best of good will, for the play is by no means shoddy.

Instead of being a drama—or a comedy-drama, as the program calls it — "Lower North" is a documentary, presenting types and incidents which must be real because they are without pretence. In it there is a dramatic idea—the thought that oddly-assorted men from all over the country are brought together to fight a war so that these men, all of them little people, shall be the meek who shall inherit the earth.

Good Single Scenes

The idea is there, and it is a good and simple one; but to become a play an idea must be embellished with drive and with suspense, and Bidwell's new piece at the Belasco Theatre has not enough of either of these qualities. One is not made aware soon enough or often enough that these students in a school for warfare are bewildered, each in his own fashion, and looking for an answer to why they are there.

There are some very good individual scenes in "Lower North" and some good individual performances. Arthur Hunnicutt, as a wholesome hillbilly philosopher; Dort Clark as a loudmouth showoff; Rusty Lane as a tough but human chief petty officer — these and others are people one might meet any time now. In the role of a marine who has come back from Guadalcanal and can't forget the hell of it, John Conway holds the stage expertly with a grim monologue. I think the monologue would be better if it were 60 seconds shorter.

One Man Rebels

The "Lower North" of the title means a section of living quarters at the training station. Here, and on the "deck" of the school and in a saloon in town, boys of 18 and men toward the limit of the draft age, from many states and occupations, study, joke, scrap, drink and make passes at whatever girls turn up.

One of them married, meets his bride of four months and is told they are going to have a baby. Suddenly to him the war is all wrong and his being in the Navy is all wrong and he decides to go AWOL. His wife and the baby are more important than the war. But he does come back to the school and he does realize that what he's in the service for is bigger than himself, wife or child. These roles are nicely played by Kim Spalding and Sara Anderson. "Lower North" is the first production of Max J. Jelin, a motion picture theatre operator. It is well set by Raymond Sovey and directed with a feeling for types rather than an urge for continuity by David Burton.

NEW YORK POST
August 26, 1944

'Lower North' Pictures Student Life at a Naval Training Station

By WILELLA WALDORF

MARTIN BIDWELL, author of "Lower North," produced last night at the Belasco Theatre, tells of the Navy as he found it, according to a program note. He found it, apparently, not unlike a boys' prep school.

Mr. Bidwell is concerned with a group of students attending Quartermasters' School at a Naval Training Station in California. Most of the usual prep-school types are present, with a few older fellows mixed in, and the house-master is a Chief Petty Officer named Pratzell who keeps trying to remind his charges that life is real, life is earnest and there's a war on without conspicuous success.

"Lower North" begins on the "Upper Deck" of the School Building where the student-sailors are boning up for examinations with signal flags, blinkers and charts; moves on to the Rendezvous Bar the same evening, and winds up next morning in a cubicle called Lower North where they sleep.

• • •

David Burton, the director, and Raymond Sovey, the designer, have seen to it that everything is ship-shape as far as technical details go, and the crew of young men who have never been to sea, but soon will be, manages to appear reasonably nautical without dancing the horn-pipe or occupying hammocks. They sleep in double-decker beds.

Everything is there, in fact, but a play. We waited around for three acts in the hope that Mr. Bidwell would get around to something of the kind, but he never did. He contented himself with a series of sketches that any one of the boys might have written home about his mates.

Mr. Bidwell is partial to the monologue. Several of his sailor-boys tell all about themselves at considerable length while they're supposed to be studying. One of them, for instance, is a lanky cow-hand pining for his horse, Daisy. We have no doubt that student sailors not far removed from civilian life go on like this at intervals in Naval Training Stations all over the country, but you can't

just copy down what they say and call it a play. It grows a bit tiresome, even when the scene changes to the Rendezvous Bar.

* * *

The depressing business of sailors on leave trying to find something to do in a strange, over-crowded town is presented with the usual drinks, juke boxes and floozies, and the war is brought closer by a wounded Marine Sergeant who wanders in from a nearby hospital to relive the hates and terrors of Guadalcanal over a series of double-bourbons.

John Conway handles this role, with its disjointed, nightmare-like monologue, impressively without letting it spill over into the maudlin, earning a long round of applause on his exit. But while the scene in itself is emotionally affecting, it is actually just another character sketch in the author's collection, glimpsed and never heard of again.

The third act, besides some familiar clowning and badgering in good old dormitory style, affords an opportunity for the philosophical cow-hand to give a lecture to a disgruntled shipmate on the subject of the little man and how it is he who always fights wars. If the little men will just get together and see that wars never happen again, he thinks, maybe the meek will eventually inherit th eearth, just as the Bible says.

* * *

Arthur Hunnicutt as the cow-hand, Dort Clark as a brash ex-soda jerker, Rusty Lane as the Chief Petty Officer, and a number of others none to easy to identify in the program helped show us the painful process by which bewildered civilians are turned into sailors, and there was amiable comic relief in the person of Dean King, a droll, rotund, easy-going youth who is Dennis King's son.

"Lower North" makes a commendable effort to picture just what the shift from peacetime to wartime means in the lives of a lot of ordinary people, and Max J. Jelin, who bows as a Broadway manager with this work, has given it a careful, solidly mounted production. Too bad the author's approach is persistently undramatic.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 27, 1944

A Dull Chunk of Navy Life

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

A DAY late in opening because the scenery collapsed, *Lower North* had its gear and tackle under control again Friday night; but the play itself was still badly in need of repairs. A "comedy-drama" about life in a naval training station, it is a well-meant but ill-contrived piece of writing, thin in texture, dawdling in tempo, and painfully trite in effect. Although the author, as a Navy man, must have written at first hand, you could hardly guess it. The picture he draws is neither colorful nor convincing; dull words have bleached his material, and clumsy craftsmanship has mangled it.

The play pictures a typical bunch of students—a smart guy, a drawling oldster, a mixed-up bright kid who almost goes "over the hill," a comic fat boy from Texas. Over them looms a tough-but-tender officer; around them flows the life of the station and the Saturday night world of bars and floozies. Their private little dramas are laboriously rotated, and when no more can be sucked out of them, there is a little rough-housing or an awkward sermon.

* * *

Failures like *Lower North* are an old story. Lacking drama and plot, being indeed studies rather than plays, they require deft characterization, telling dialogue, skilful use of detail. There is nothing to cover up with, and when as here they are done without talent, the effect is hackneyed and bare. The production, too, is an uneven one; in a large cast Arthur Hunnicut, Kim Spalding and one or two others seemed most at home. Raymond Sovey has done some effective sets.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 26, 1944

Lower North an Excellent War Play

By BURTON RASCOE

I SPENT an enjoyable and profitable evening at the Belasco last night learning about the ways of life among kids in naval training through the agency of a comedy-drama by Martin Bidwell called Lower North. Aside from some patent defects in the writing, Lower North comes very near being a first-rate play. As it is, it is continuously interesting; its great merit is in its characterizations of highly individualized youthful personalities; it has moments which bring tears to your eyes and moments which give you either a happy chuckle or a hearty laugh.

It may be that the play has two strikes against it from the point of timeliness. Had it been presented two years ago it would (I think) have been a great success. For, in my opinion, it is superior to The Eve of St. Mark or, indeed, to any other war play we have had. It has dignity, taste, warmth, reality and point (although the point is labored in one spot with too much unction and rhetoric).

Lower North tells the story of enlisted men, gathered from all parts of the country into a naval training station and of how their rugged American individualism and adolescent coltishness are imperceptibly, rather than by severe discipline, broken down into the stuff that makes good fighting men. What used to be called esprit de corps is something they acquire without knowing it. That's the story of Lower North.

Sympathy for Noncom

When the play opens the audience is in condolence with the tough navy noncom who is trying to inspire some sense of sailorship and discipline among a bunch of irresponsible youngsters, who find themselves in a war without wanting to be and all nursing much greater grievances against their circumstances than against any enemy nation. One is a cocky showoff; another is a fat mama's boy; another is a serious chap whose law course was interrupted and whose fiancee insisted on marriage even though he thought that was unfair to her because he might come back crippled or not at all; another is a 16-year-old who worships his older brother in the air corps; one was a foundling brought up in an orphanage; another is a homely farm lad who never loved anything except a horse, and the others are pathetic kids who want to be old enough to have liquor, instead of cokes, served them in well-regulated saloons.

Learn Sense of Duty

They all accidentally acquire a sense of what war is from a 19-year-old sergeant (who aged 20 years in the first push at Guadalcanal), and they all learn, to their surprise, that their attempts to cover up for an honor student who had overstayed his leave is the spirit of unity which makes an army and a navy.

The first act is too talky; in the immortal words of Roy Renard, it gets the audience monotonous. There is a homily on "the little people," which is much too long and seemed dubbed in rather than proceeding from character. And some of the scenes are theatrical rather than dramatic. But even these faults are no worse and much less pretentious than those same faults in two very successful plays of the past two seasons with war backgrounds. The settings by Raymond Sovey are excellent, particularly for the barroom scene in which occurs both the highest comedy and the most touching drama of the play. David Burton's masterly direction enabled every member of the cast to give a good account of himself, with special honors to John Conway, Dort Clark, Dean King, Blanche Faye, Blanche Gladstone, Kim Spalding and Arthur Hunnicut.

NEW YORK SUN
August 26, 1944

'Lower North,' Presented at Belasco, Elaborate Production of Aimless Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

NOW comes the Belasco's turn to start its season and so it did last night with a play of Navy life, an aimless and inexpert piece called "Lower North," written by a new playwright, Martin Bidwell, and submitted by Max J. Jelin, making his bow as a producer.

Mr. Jelin has supplied an expensive realistic production but the play is never up to it. There is a big cast of young men in Navy garb and they talk their way through three acts, but the playwright is seldom there to guide them. Now and then come moments to which you listen, and the evening brings forth several engaging performances, but they are not sufficient to save the play—or make it.

Mr. Bidwell, having served in the Navy, writes of the yearnings and frustrations, the groanings and gripings, the blustering and brawling, the laughter and the loyalties of the boys of a quartermaster school of a naval training station—of the little guys from all over who go to make up a Navy and of their realization of the big job that lies ahead of them. Specifically, it is a story of Sailor Jim, who goes A. W. O. L. to meet his young wife, who wants to quit and "go over the hill" when he learns that she is to have a baby, but who returns to stick it out, and to find himself the honor man of his section.

There is a great deal of declamation and very little drama in "Lower North." A lot of sentiment is crowded in here and there. It's a well-intentioned play, but there is no distinction in the writing. For most of the way it is slow-gaited. David Burton, in his direction, has sought to bring life to the script but he has had scant success.

Some of the players rise above their material. Certainly, Arthur Hunnicutt, to be remembered from Saroyan adventures, gets something of a characterization into the part of Curley. Kim Spalding does what he can with the sketchily written role of Jim. Sara Anderson is appealing in her brief scene as Jim's wife. Blanche Faye and Blanche Gladstone are very amusing as pick-up girls in the Rendezvous bar. John Conway does a good deal with a Marine Sergeant, who was in the thick of it at Guadalcanal, and John Farrell gives reality to the bartender's role.

Raymond Sovey's sets, particularly the juke box bar and the sleeping-quarters cubicle that is called Lower North, are excellent.

So, into the house that David Warfield opened in 1907 with "A Grand Army Man," comes an elaborate production of a diffuse and hobbling play. Mr. Bidwell undoubtedly knows his Navy, but as a job of playwriting "Lower North" doesn't come off.

Now Available **Motion Picture Critic's Reviews**

"Song of Norway"

Operetta, book by Milton Lazarus from a play by Homer Curran; musical adaptation and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest; directed by Charles K. Freeman; settings by Lemuel Ayres; dances by George Balanchine. Presented by Edwin Lester at the Imperial Theatre, August 21, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 22, 1944

Song of Norway Is Tops as Operetta

By BURTON RASCOE

THE cheers, bravos, bravas and hand-clapping were a long time dying out at the Imperial last night; for gratified music lovers had just been presented with a thrilling production of a new operetta which is destined to become a classic in the field, along with Blossom Time, Rosalinda, Rose-Marie, Sally and The Student Prince.

The work is called Song of Norway and is based upon the life and music of Edvard Grieg. It had previously been shown in Los Angeles and San Francisco, where it scored sensational successes. Edwin Lester, the producer, has brought the entire production (including every member of the cast from prima donna to chorus girl) intact to Broadway.

Met Star in Role

Song of Norway has all the elements of enduring appeal. There is nothing topical or ephemeral about it. It has romance and sentiment, satire and comedy in just the right proportions; the melodies in it are familiar to every piano student or radio listener, and they are cleverly and tastefully worked into an intelligent book by Milton Lazarus; with musical adaptations and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest. Some 250 musical compositions by Grieg have been culled for an eminently satisfying score, brilliantly interpreted by Arthur Kay and a splendid orchestra.

Irra Petina, the Metropolitan opera star, scored the greatest personal triumph last night with her vivacious singing of the role of Louisa Giovanni, the Italian prima donna, who sought to "inspire" Grieg but succeeded only in nearly ruining his original genius by encouraging him to write light, frothy stuff in the Italian mode of the moment. Mme. Petina is an actress of very exceptional ability—a rare thing in a singer with a voice as wonderful as hers is; she was an utter delight in her flirtations, her displays of temperament and other subacid etchings of her satirical portrait of a self-indulgent and resourceful artiste.

Lawrence Brooks, who sang the role of Grieg, is good looking and has an appealing personality as well as a voice of resonance and charm. Robert Shafer, as Grieg's Norwegian boyhood friend and poet, also is personable and ingratiating. Movie-goers, who have long delighted in Sig Arno for his bit performances as an excitable Italian waiter, music teacher or butler, will be both surprised and tickled by his juicy portrayal of the foppish but amusing Count Peppi Le Loup, the exasperated and exasperating husband of La Giovanni.

So excellently played and sung are all the principal roles in this show that, if space permitted, I should like to pay individual tribute to everyone in the cast; but special posies must go to Ivy Scott as Mother Grieg, to Walter Kingford as Father Grieg, to Helena Bliss as Nina Hagerup, to Alexandra Danilova as Adelina and to Robert Bernard, as the comical impresario, who lives in a hell of prima donnas and prima ballerinas.

Grieg in Rome

The story tells of Grieg's boyhood ambition to write music indigenous to Norway, embodying the spirit and accents of Norwegian folklore, and of his being temporarily estranged from both his ambition and his childhood sweetheart by being made acquainted with the fashionable world of Rome, as the composer-accompanist and protege of Louisa Giovanni, until his meeting with Henrik Ibsen and the death of his friend, Rikard, mature his genius and give him back to Norway as that country's voice in music.

As an indication of the quality of this production I should remind you that the choreography is by George Balanchine, who has selected 24 topnotch dancers from the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo for the ballet numbers, and that the singing ensemble is made up of choice singers from the Los Angeles and San Francisco Civic Light Opera. The chorus is the loveliest and freshest seen in a Broadway production in a long time. The settings and costumes are in perfect harmony with the mood and period of the operetta. Song of Norway is something you should count on seeing.

THE CAST

Sigrid	Janet Hamer
Einar	Kent Edwards
Eric	Robert Antoine
Gunnar	William Carroll
Grima	Patti Brady
Helga	Jackie Lee
Rikard Nordraak	Robert Shafer
Nina Hagerup	Helena Bliss
Edvard Grieg	Lawrence Brooks
Father Grieg	Walter Kingsford
Father Nordraak	Philip White
Mother Grieg	Ivy Scott
Freddy	Frederic Franklin
Count Peppi Le Loup	Sig Arno
Louisa Giovanni	Irra Petina
Members of the Faculty:	Ewing Mitchell, Audrey Guard, Paul De Poyster
Inn Keeper	Lewis Bolyard
Frau Professor Norden	Doreen Wilson
Elvera	Sharon Randall
Hedwig	Karen Lund
Greta	Gwen Jones
Margharета	Ann Andre
Hilda	Elizabeth Bockoven
Miss Anders	Sonia Orlova
Henrik Ibsen	Dudley Clements
Tito	Frederic Franklin
Maestro Pisoni	Robert Bernard
Butler	Cameron Grant
Adelina	Alexandra Danilova
Maid	Nora White
Signora Eleanora	Barbara Boudwin
Children	Sylvia Allen, Grace Carroll, Pat O'Rourke, Shannon Randolph

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 22, 1944

Grieg's Tunes Save His Life

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

OUT of the life and tunes of Edvard Grieg has come a pleasant operetta in the popular style. *Song of Norway* is purely formula stuff, without style or originality, which dresses up Grieg's life into a romantic and showy period piece; but it is not too solemn about it, and it has used Grieg's music to good effect. Moreover, it is the right kind of music for Broadway—colorful and easy, and for the most part not so familiar as to seem hackneyed. There are, of course, *Anitra's Dance* and *Ich liebe dich* and *To Spring* and snatches from the Piano Concerto. But with these go other agreeable tunes that are less well-known; tunes that are warbled and reprised, that are danced to and turned into choruses and swelling operatic crescendoes.

As for the story, presumably there are only two popular plots into which a composer can be fitted—either he must be the victim of unrequitted love and, after composing deathless music to his fair one, pine away and die; or he must be enmeshed for a time with an amorous and capricious opera singer. *Song of Norway* has chosen the opera singer, on what historical grounds I cannot say, since neither Grove nor the *Britannica* provides the least help. But of the two plots, I confess I find it the less painful, and since in the present case the diva is Irra Petina, it even has its advantages. For Miss Petina, besides having a good voice, has a likeable personality and a nice comedy manner. She, indeed, manages to keep the proceedings fairly light, though she cannot prevent their becoming too long. Like almost all operettas, *Song of Norway* has more book than is good for it—and no better book than most.

* * *

As Grieg, Lawrence Brooks is making his Broadway debut, and turns out to be a personable young man with a pleasant voice. Helena Bliss, who plays his long-suffering sweetheart and wife, is nice to look at and listen to, also. The cast in general is a competent one.

One can accept the popular style of *Song of Norway*, and yet feel disappointed that so fine a choreographer as George Balanchine, and such fine dancers as Danilova, Franklin and the others of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo have left so little imprint on it. *Song of Norway* has all the choreographic staples of operetta, from peasants dancing in the market-place to fashionable folk waltzing in a ballroom. But the effects, for the most part, are no more than agreeably commonplace. Balanchine has not done his usual job by a long shot. If he has eliminated most of that skipping and scurrying that usually distinguish operetta from musical comedy, only in the waltz scene has he come up with any of the lightness and inventiveness and charm of which, at his best, he is a master. And, though the ballet performers display some of their technical skill, they are given no chance to infuse any distinction into their numbers.

But if you'd like to hear some nice tuneful music and will settle for competent regulation Broadway standards, *Song of Norway* should give you an enjoyable evening.

NEW YORK SUN
August 22, 1944

'Song of Norway,' Folk Operetta at Imperial, Is Melodious and Colorful

By WARD MOREHOUSE

FROM out of the West—specifically, from Los Angeles and San Francisco—there has come to town a folk operetta, "Song of Norway," and a colorful and beguiling piece it is. Presenting an evening of the music of Edvard Grieg, it was brought into the Imperial Theater last night under the auspices of Edwin Lester, and undoubtedly with the blessings of the Shuberts.

In "Blossom Time" the songs of Franz Schubert, along with his life story, reached the stage, and "Blossom Time" has been one of the theater's enduring properties. Now into "Song of Norway" are woven the compositions of the man whose music was nationalistic, who had great feeling for the land of his birth.

The principal asset of "Song of Norway" is its score. But it is also an operetta that is handsomely staged and skillfully lighted. There are attractive folk costumes and stunning ballets. The ensemble effects are excellent. There is a serviceable, although at times dragging, libretto.

The book of "Song of Norway," written by

Milton Lazarus from an original by Homer Curran, first reveals the brilliant Grieg in the cheerful placidity of his native Norway, where he has his music, his family, his sweetheart and his great friend, Rikard Nordraak, the poet, whose poem inspired his piano concerto. Into Grieg's life comes a character created by the librettists—Louisa, the countess, who is an opera singer. Grieg becomes a part of her retinue and goes to Copenhagen and later to Rome, where he wins acclaim at a sacrifice of happiness. He eventually returns to Bergen with his devoted Nina to make their home and continue his life's work.

The score brings forth delightful and enormously effective numbers — "Hill of Dreams" (from A-Minor Concerto), "I Love You" ("Ich Liebe Dich"), "At Christmastime" (from "Woodland Wanderings"), "Freddy and His Fiddle" (from "Norwegian Dance"), "Midsummer's Eve" (from "'Twas on a Lovely Eve in June") and the "Peer Gynt" music.

"Song of Norway" is the work of a combination of talents. The adaptation of the Grieg music has been done, and done extraordinarily well, by Robert Wright and George Forrest; they also did the lyrics. The musical direction is by Arthur Kay. Lemuel Ayers has contributed excellent north-country backgrounds and Howard Bay's job of lighting is an expert one. The ballets are beautifully executed by the artist personnel of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the ballets and musical numbers are staged by George Balanchine.

It's a first-rate company that the West Coast has sent on to Broadway. Irra Petina sings well and is amusing and vivacious as the Countess Louisa. Helen Bliss makes an appealing Nina. Robert Shafer is excellent as the Poet Nordraak and Lawrence Brooks does well with the role of the moody and brilliant Grieg. Sig Arno presents a droll characterization and Dudley Clements appears impressively but briefly as Henrik Ibsen. The solo ballet of Alexandra Danilova is admirable.

"Song of Norway" is both creditable and charming. It has great vitality and is as pretty as it is melodious. I welcome it to New York, to the Imperial Theater and to the new theatrical season.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 22, 1944

'Song of Norway' a Beautiful, Melodious Musical Biography

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"SONG OF NORWAY" is as beautifully produced a musical play as you can hope to see. It deserves more than an ordinary welcome, for it is not a native Broadway offering. Coming from Los Angeles, it is a heartening indication that not all of show business is centered in New York. It is lovely and it is ambitious; its company has spirit and is admirably drilled; it never is cheap and often it is thrilling.

And sometimes it is just too darn solemn.

The solemnity, perhaps, cannot be helped, for "Song of Norway" is a music-show biography of Edvard Hagerup Grieg, who wrote a whale of a piano concerto, the "Peer Gynt" suite and a flock of songs. Biography is a tough thing to get gay with, and even the immortal "Blossom Time," which purported to delineate the life of Franz Schubert, was as corny as "The Old Homestead" and as schmaltzy as a tuba in a sidewalk band.

Has Dignity and Class

I'm no expert on the life of Grieg, having just boned up on it six hours ago, so what happens to him in this new musical play can be gospel truth or a passel of lies and I won't know the difference. But what does happen to him on the stage of the Imperial Theatre makes sense and has a quality of dignity and class—so it's okay by me.

Edwin Lester, the producer, has put together "Song of Norway" with intelligence, respect and a careful disregard of money. His company strikes you, first, as a fresh, lusty and handsome troupe ready to sing the night away, or to dance it away whenever it is time for dancing. On second glance it strikes you as being uncommonly well cast for individual performances.

The show is long, winding up with a not too thrilling ballet version of the piano concerto, and it is too late for writing to do more than hit a high spot or two. One of these high spots, certainly, is the enchanting performance of Helena Bliss as Nina Hagerup, a cousin of Grieg's, who becomes his wife. Equally certainly, another is the performance of the Metropolitan Opera's Irra Petina, in the role of an Italian prima donna who messes up Grieg's love-life.

As Grieg, Lawrence Brooks offers an excellent baritone and the woozy manner of a musical genius, and the fourth principal voice, the tenor of Robert Shafer, is no less admirable.

Ballet Russe Dancers

The dances, designed by George Balanchine and executed by Alexandra Danilova, Frederick Franklin and a company from the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, are refreshing and, obviously, expert. Lemuel Ayers' sets range from simple but wonderfully theatrical backdrops, like the ones in "Oklahoma," to full-stage layouts which bespeak quiet luxury.

Two youngsters, Robert Wright and George Forrest, have adapted the Grieg music and given it words—and Forrest's lyrics are good and unusually well spoken by principals and chorus. To Milton Lazarus fell the job of making a plot out of Grieg's life, and he has made a well-behaved operetta book which doesn't get in the way too much.

Songs? You may think you can't bring a Grieg tune into your head—but you'll find you know almost all of them in "Song of Norway." Two or three are from the concerto; a dance, "Freddy and His Fiddle," is capitally amusing.

"Song of Norway" has its sobersided stretches, but it also has comedy. Miss Petina's temperamental diva is a work of humor as well as of good singing, and in the role of her mincing husband is an amusing fellow from the movies, Sig Arno. A final word of respect goes to Arthur Kay, who arranged the Grieg score and who conducts a capable orchestra. Mr. Kay, more than any other one person, keeps "Song of Norway" going, and his entry into the ranks of Broadway musical conductors is an occasion for pleasure.

NEW YORK POST
August 22, 1944

'Song of Norway' Immortalizes Grieg as the Hero of an Operetta

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE life and music of Edvard Grieg have at last been immortalized in operetta, putting him on a par with Chopin, Schubert and the rest of the masters. "Song of Norway," which reached the Imperial Theatre last night after a fabulous success on the West Coast, is a huge, elaborate, densely populated production that is often genuinely melodious—though not, surprisingly enough, as often as you would suppose—lavishly embellished with ballet and even reasonably well equipped with comedy. Looking back, we can't imagine how the producers restrained themselves sufficiently to omit animals. Even without animals, however, we found it all pretty overwhelming.

Grieg's music, both the familiar and the not so familiar, has been "adapted" and supplied with lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest, who have attacked the original compositions with gusto and, generally speaking, done a good job of popularizing the master. Milton Lazarus, working from a play by Homer Curran, sticks just about as close to the facts of Grieg's life in writing the book as the adaptors have stuck to his music—meaning not too close to impede the progress of a lavishly conventional operetta conceived and produced in the good old-fashioned way.

The Grand Tour

Edvard's father is in the fish business, apparently to bring in a few jokes. "Few people like music but everybody likes fish!" is his argument against Edvard's pursuit of his profession in foreign parts.

Edvard, however, has caught the eye of an excitable Countess, who is also an opera singer—or perhaps we should say, an opera singer who is also a Countess—so off he goes on the grand tour, as her accompanist. The Countess, we have been assured in the advance publicity, is a purely fictional character, dreamed up for theatrical purposes, and we see no reason to doubt it. As played, and sung, by Irra Petina, the mezzo soprano who has appeared at the Metropolitan, she brings a good deal of what used to be called vim, vigor and vitality to a sometimes lagging and rather heavy performance.

Miss Petina, winking, gesturing and tossing her head like a circus pony, cruises around the stage putting on an amiable caricature of a temperamental prima donna while Sig Arno, as her long-suffering spouse, manages to be uncommonly amusing with rather sparse material.

The first act, which goes on entirely in Bergen, Norway, in the year 1860, is definitely folksy with everybody dancing and attending festivals and talking about trolls, plus a great deal of Grieg sung at the top of the company's lungs. It was a great relief when they finally stopped shouting and calmed down for a few seconds while Ivy Scott, the hero's mother, gave us a nice softer passage in touching style.

Later on, when everybody who could travel repaired to the Continent, and finally landed in Rome, there was less ensemble shouting and several of the principals had a chance to deliver some of the songs with more finesse than they seemed able to display in the wintery north country.

Some Pleasant Singers

Miss Petina, who sometimes does peculiar things with her voice, sang last night with spirit and dash. Lawrence Brooks revealed a pleasant baritone as Grieg himself, when he wasn't called upon to sit frowning over the piano composing something for the orchestra to play. And Helena Bliss, as the composer's neglected wife, finally came into her own after a dull life on the Continent with a charmingly rendered version of the famous "Ich Liebe Dich."

It was George Balanchine and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, headed by Alexandra Danilova and Frederic Franklin, who had the biggest share of the evening, however, with one whole session given over, of course, to the "Peer Gynt" suite. Mr. Balanchine's choreography struck us as routine throughout, even with the Ballet Russe dancing, but it was good old-style ballet the customers apparently love.

There is so much to see and hear in "Song of Norway" that it is difficult to sum it up with any sort of accuracy, but we had an impression of cleavage in two stage styles at frequent intervals. The musical numbers and the ballet seemed to be clinging to the old tried and true operetta formula with choruses finishing numbers all waving hands in the air, lights suddenly going off on everybody in the room but one singer who stood in a spot and warbled while everybody else stood as in a trance, etc.

The book by Milton Lazarus, neatly staged by Charles K. Freeman, on the other hand, had its tongue in its cheek in a pleasant, modern fashion much of the time, and several scenes with no singing in them what-

ever proved unexpectedly diverting.

There's enough in "Song of Norway" to please almost any taste much of the time. It is probably destined to take up the torch when "Blossom Time" finally drops from sheer exhaustion if it ever does.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 22, 1944

Music Hath Charms

By HOWARD BARNES

THE life and music of Edvard Grieg are celebrated in "Song of Norway." The melodies are admirably suited to the vocal and dancing embellishments of an operetta. Fresh voices and smart ballet numbers make the new show at the Imperial a considerable delight. The so-called book which gives the piece the dimensions of a musical drama is lamentable. It is quite probable that the Norwegian composer's life was not particularly dramatic. Even so, it could scarcely have been as dull as the cluttered cliches of the libretto would have you believe.

• • •

This animated amalgam of waltzes, concertos, suites and love songs is strictly moth-eaten when the performers try to get by without the orchestra. The big moment of the book has Grieg holding his head and mourning his dead friend with a triple take of "he's gone" and "I failed him." Since the band is generally playing, it is possible to be tolerant where the biography is concerned. Settle for the vocal and terpsichorean arrangements of well-known melodies and "Song of Norway" is an agreeable addition to early season festivities.

• • •

For the works of Grieg lend themselves to all sorts of tricky interpolations. The "Peer Gynt Suite" inspires a lovely ballet at the Imperial, with Frederic Franklin, Alexandra Danilova and members of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo magnificently on their toes. "Ich Liebe Dich" and "Springtide" offer catchy arias for Lawrence Brooks, Robert Shafer and Irra Petina. And the ensemble of the Los Angeles and San Francisco Light Opera sing delightfully through a number of the Robert Wright and George Forrest adaptations.

• • •

As you may have guessed, the production comes out of the Far West. Under Edwin Lester's supervision, it is blessed with more than the usual quota of up and coming talent. Brooks is admirable when the Grieg he is portraying is in a singing mood; Miss Petina is on key and rather archly amusing, and Helena Bliss, as Grieg's wife, stumbles only when she has to act a badly written role. Dudley Clements stalks through a couple of scenes as Ibsen and Sig Arno and Walter Kingsford almost pull off a drunk scene which Milton Lazarus has incorporated in his biography. Meanwhile Lemuel Ayers has designed the show pleasantly; Howard Bay's lighting is frequently exciting, and George Balanchine has put real polish on the ensembles. "Song of Norway" is a dramatic dud enlivened with sprightly musical numbers.

NEW YORK TIMES
August 22, 1944

"Song of Norway"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

AFTER spending such time in the lower depths that even its best friends had begun to wonder, the theatre last evening showed it still can produce a pleasant show when it wants to try. Last night's occasion was the arrival here from the Coast of "Song of Norway," an operetta about Grieg and using his music. After what seemed to be months of increasing horror, sitting in the theatre again became an agreeable occupation, and the Imperial Theatre would be entitled to put out a plaque saying that there, on Aug. 21, the tide changed.

• • •

"Song of Norway" has a good many things of great cheer. The Grieg music is beautiful, and the cast can sing it. Up the street from the Metropolitan Opera Company has come Irra Petina to play one of the leading roles, and if they ever let her go back below Forty-second Street, the theatre people are more foolish than usual. George Balanchine has directed the dances, and while they are not from his topmost shelf, he did not have to stoop for them either. The costumes and scenery are attractive and the chorus knows its business and there is a large orchestra to see that Grieg is not cheated of his rights.

In random notes on operetta it is customary to reserve the third paragraph for an attack on the book. That contributed in the present instance by Milton Lazarus, from a play by Homer Curran, is not the best feature "Song of Norway" can boast. Dialogue in operetta mainly is the space between songs, and some of the spaces currently are pretty long. The plot, such as it is, is about the composer and his friend, Rikard Nordraak, Grieg's wife and an opera singer. However, the plot, such as it is, does offer the branches on which can be hung "Peer Gynt," "To Spring" the "A-Minor Concerto," "Ich Liebe Dich" and many more. Such a plot will do, and they can cut a bit of the conversation.

• • •

As Louisa Giovanni, the opera singer who captures Grieg, Miss Petina is something pretty special. The Opera sometimes sends voices north, but not always are they accompanied by actresses. Miss Petina has a gay air of one on vacation, who takes her part not too seriously and who obviously enjoys it. She can sing a number about the opera in a perfect blend of opera and Tin Pan Alley, and as a diva on the prowl she has some of the classical niceties of Mae West. Helena Bliss is extremely attractive as the girl who becomes Grieg's wife, and Lawrence Brooks is a composer who, on the stage, also can sing.

Robert Wright and George Forrest adapted the Grieg songs, the program honestly setting forth that "Hill of Dreams" comes from the A-Minor Concerto, "Hymn of Betrothal" from "To Spring," and all down the line. The lyrics are not particularly distinguished but they are cheerful enough, and the chorus sings them out with an unafraid volume. Ibsen is brought on so that Grieg can write "Peer Gynt," and that emerges at the Imperial as a ballet with Alexandra Danilova and "the artist personnel" of the Ballet Russe —and "Peer Gynt" is all right that way, too.

This season it has been the Coast, and Edwin Lester and the Los Angeles and San Francisco Civic Light Opera, which started Broadway in the right direction.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 22, 1944

'Song of Norway' Opens At Imperial

By ROBERT GARLAND

TODAY'S a Yes-Day!

We East Coasters have been hearing much that is good about "Song of Norway," the operetta based on the life-and-music of Edvard Grieg, much as "Blossom Time" is based on the life-and-music of Franz Schubert. Well, the piece showed up last night in Forty-fifth Street, having safely crossed the Great Divide and arranged itself engagingly on the stage of the Imperial Theatre. There, I'm sure, you're going to find it for quite some time to come.

There's beautiful tunes which Edvard Grieg managed to write without the help of Sigmund Romberg. There's beautiful singing by Irra Petina, a refugee from the Metropolitan. There's beautiful dancing by Alexandra Danilova, under the watchful eye of George Balanchine. There're musical adaptations and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest. And a book that serves by Milton Lazarus, by way of Homer Curran.

These, aided or abetted by Edwin Lester as producer; Lemuel Ayres as production designer; Carl Kent as setting supervisor; Charles Freeman as costume executer; Robert Davison as costume designer; an orchestra made up of not-too-rugged individualists; many a member of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, and a dozen or more singing peasants from the Los Angeles and San Francisco Civic Light Opera Companies, add up to no small theatrical something.

He Does Her Right

The life-and-music of Edvard Grieg gets under way on Troldhaugen—which is to say, Hill of the Trolls—outside Bergen, Norway. It is midsummer's eve. And the early Eighteen Sixties. Rikard Nordraak is on hand, delivering himself of a legend to the tune of the A-Minor Concerto. So are Nina Hagerup and Edvard Grieg, forming a triangle which is, as the saying goes, eternal. Rikard and Nina and Edvard. One and two and three.

The legend once out of the way, Rikard and Nina and Edvard turn their three-cornered attention to "Hill of Dreams," also founded on the concerto in A-Minor. Here you discover that while Rikard loves Nina and Nina loves Edvard, Edvard cares dearly for himself. Which is why, when "Song of Norway" moves into a square on the outskirts of Bergen, Edvard leaves town with Louisa Giovanni, Count Peppi le Loup's celebrated singing girl-friend.

Edvard Grieg, the Chopin-to-be-of-Norway, is engaged as Louisa's accompanist. On the piano, mind you! So, to bring about one of those necessary girl-loses-boy mid-operetta finales, our composer-hero departs from Bergen to Copenhagen, from Copenhagen to Rome, becoming more and more famous, sophisticated and disinterested in the folks back home. But, in the end, Edvard does right by everybody, returning to compose the "Song of Norway" which gives the work its title.

And its biggest and best ballet.

• • •

As you can sense, the plot is manipulated and more than a little clumsy. But, at the same time, it is so well sung and so well spoken, that it doesn't really matter. What really does matter is that the acting is good, the dancing is better, the music is best and the whole undertaking is the first head-in-air production the new season has so far provided.

Again and again I expect to see and hear it. Especially hear it. The "Freddy and His Fiddle" which has been made out of "Norwegian Dance," "Now," "Strange Music," "Midsummer's Eve," "Hymn of Betrothal," "Three Loves," "Waltz Eternal," "Peer Gynt Suite," "At Christmastime" and "I Love You," just as if Edvard Grieg were Cole Porter and the new arrival at the Imperial were "A Norwegian Hayride." Here are tunes to treasure!

Of the cast, more perhaps later. Suffice it now to report that the ladies, Irra Petina, Helena Bliss and Ivy Scott, sing beautifully; that the gentlemen, Lawrence Brooks, Robert Shafer, are their equals; that the dancers, Alexandra Danilova, Frederic Franklin and Nathalie Krassovska, perform with skill and spirit, and that, putting these and other things together, there's a new success today in Forty-fifth Street, west of Broadway.

"Song Of Norway" is an earful, an eyeful and a hit.

"Good Morning Corporal"

Comedy by Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck; staged by William B. Friedlander; setting by Robert Barnhart. Presented by Mr. Friedlander at the Playhouse, August 8, 1944.

THE CAST

Corporal Rourke	Joel Marston
Dottie Carson	Charita Bauer
Helen Moore	Frances Tannehill
O'Banion Broderick	Russell Hardie
A Man	Donald Foster
Alvin Stacey	Lionel Wilson

NEW YORK TIMES
August 9, 1944

Oops!

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE this is the month in which you count ten before starting any drama review, let today's note be sullenly factual. "Good Morning Corporal," by Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck, opened last evening at the Playhouse, an event which found the Broadway theatre standing solidly at the nadir—or even just a shade below it. There were those on Forty-eighth Street who whimpered that the new comedy is the worst of the season; they were perhaps not fair and of short memory. But it is quite dreadful for all of that.

The story is about a young lady who marries a series of service men, marriages made from sheer good-will and to aid the war effort. Since all seem to have been drunk at the time, none has enjoyed the advantages of marriage, to use a circumlocution not used at the Playhouse, and when they seek out their mutual wife, they are determinedly earthy. They also are boring, to be mild about it, making a great clatter before delivering sad little lines, and being knocked down by the rattling skeleton of a dull and dreary plot. Charita Bauer, as the girl, plays one of the sappiest roles in the Forties and is unable to prove it otherwise; Russell Hardie is one of the husbands. William B. Friedlander, the producer, directed with an eye on negligee rather than wit.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 9, 1944

But Not a Good Night

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

BROADWAY is still slogging along in the summer doldrums, still waiting for a hit to stimulate the new season. Its most recent hope, "Good Morning Corporal," has turned out to be just another limping August disappointment. This self-styled comedy, which was presented last night at the Playhouse by William B. Friedlander, is almost exactly the same rough mixture of sex, joke-book humor and bad taste that was found in the two productions last week. The only hopeful note in this diabolical repetition of inept bedroom farce is that perhaps the air will at last have been cleared for a better theme.

• • •

As its title implies, "Good Morning Corporal," has something to do with the boys in uniform. The authors, Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck, have built their three acts around a girl whose patriotic turn of mind leads her into marriage with a soldier, a sailor and a marine all at one and the same time. This is not a juvenile delinquency play; the idea is that the previous contenders are supposed to be dead when she makes her third patriotic sacrifice. But early in the first act husband No. 1, the marine, turns up, and from then on it is a contest as to which one can claim the other half of the young lady's Murphy bed. As there is only this one situation to last the play through its entire length, it is evident that dialogue ought to carry most of the load.

• • •

But it is precisely in this matter of dialogue that the play is at its unblushing worst. Despite the manipulations of two authors, the humor of "Good Morning Corporal," remains on a level with the gags on those comic postcards that one finds in seaside resorts. These heavy bricks of bad taste are dropped frequently into the middle of a dull farce that has not been lightened or quickened by any other devices. The one situation drags through three acts whose rare action is contained only in a few bits of packing and unpacking, dressing and undressing or exits and entrances made for very weak reasons. It takes the F. B. I. in a trumped-up ending to stop the thing from going on and on, seemingly past the final curtain.

• • •

The actors are less at fault than the other collaborators. Russell Hardie does as much as any one could for the play as husband No. 1, a big, thick-headed marine private. Charita Bauer has the most to do as the little girl with the multiple husbands; she is handicapped greatly by the out-and-out silliness of her lines. Joel Marston is a promising juvenile, playing the soldier-husband No. 3, but he is a bit too clean-cut for this sort of nonsense. The set, need we add, is a New York bedroom done up in fancy colors. Since there is very little of interest going on in this "Good Morning Corporal" boudier, salacious or otherwise, it is to be hoped that the theater will get out of the bedroom into more auspicious regions, at least for the time being.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 9, 1944

Good Morning, Corporal Libels Soldier Morals

By BURTON RASCOE

IT IS high time theater people organized an OPA of their own and established a bottom on productions, below which no play should be allowed to go. Deflation of the drama is serious when it reaches the point achieved at the Playhouse last night. The occasion was the presentation of Good Morning, Corporal, an acute embarrassment by Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck, from which sensitive members of the audience began to flee before the first act was over.

The way things were going last year with such trashy exhibits as Victory Belles, The World Is Full of Girls, and Lady, Behave! (all flops, incidentally) it was inevitable, I suppose, that someone would get the idea of having the first-act curtain go up showing a soldier and a girl in bed and the soldier waking up with a hangover and wondering how he got there.

The authors or William B. Friedlander, the director-producer, had this idea and a follow-up designed to be what is called "socko" in the patois of Times Sq.: The girl gets out of bed wearing a sheer silk nightgown, parades around a bit before putting on a loose dressing gown, tells her night's companion that they were married by a justice of the peace the evening before, while her groom stomps around the room, protesting, in his underwear.

Crude and Cheap

I am not a prude. I can imagine a play with such a beginning turning out to be a very laughable farce or a very fine serious drama. But everything in this nauseating ineptitude last night was so crude, cheap, vulgar, artificial and phony that I saw people in the audience squirming and looking furtively about as though they were in anguish and thoroughly ashamed of seeing what they were seeing. The dialogue sounded as though it were written by a juvenile delinquent and the stage-direction was on a par with it.

You discover, as the gags progress, that Dottie Carson is patriotism-crazy. She has written 1000 letters to men overseas telling each of them she holds him in her arms at night while he fights for her; she works in a defense plant by day (dropping by the blood bank mornings to donate a pint of her blood); she was an interceptor in the air-raid service; she participates in rallies of all kinds; she contributes her husbands' allotments to the Army and the Navy relief funds; she "keeps up the morale of the fighting men" by going to gin mills with them every night; and she has married, seriatim, a marine, a sailor and an army corporal—all three of them while they were drunk. The first two have been reported dead. . . . . The marine shows up alive in the first act and the sailor in the third.

Libel on GI's

The action takes place between morning and midnight. I use the word "action" here in an euphemistic sense. To put it as delicately as possible. Most of the "action" is taken up with crudely direct (rather than suggestive) talk about which one is to enjoy the right of the first night with the girl, since none of the marriages has been consummated — the marine and the sailor having had their leaves canceled the day they found themselves married. The girl has a roommate, also required to undress before the audience and parade around in a diaphanous nightgown. She is supposed to furnish the hard-boiled realistic contrast to the dizzy innocence of the khaki-wacky heroine.

Good Morning, Corporal, is not only a libel on the men in the armed services (who are entitled at least to credible representation if not some decent respect), but also a libel on the human race. In fact, it is a libel on the arts of playwriting and directing.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 9, 1944

Sex Keeps On Going Downhill

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SO FAR as I can see, life at the workhouse can't be very much worse than it was at the Playhouse Tuesday night. On that grey occasion, August insisted on having its third straight try at sex; and the result managed to be the dirtiest show that has hit Broadway in many months, and at the same time the dullest. The unblushing wisecracks of *Good Morning Corporal* are combined with so terrible a plot, such tedious incidents, such ghastly direction and such generally bad acting that to enjoy the show you would paradoxically have to have a very low mind, and no mind at all.

Good Morning Corporal tells of a super-patriotic Dulcy who thinks there is no better way of boosting the morale of the Armed Forces than by marrying as many warriors as she can. Presumbly her image is to spur all of them on in battle. In any case, she becomes the wife—in name only—of a soldier, a sailor and a marine. Naturally all three are soon collected under her roof, fighting for her favors, and furiously working her Murphy bed in and out of the wall to make sure you get the point.

As the pinhead of a bride, Charita Bauer had to cope with the silliest role of the season, and probably can't be very much blamed if she didn't make it any better by her playing. Considering the script and the direction they were up against, Russell Hardie, as the Marine, and Joel Marston, as the corporal, did better at times than you could have expected.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 9, 1944

'Good Morning Corp.' A Very Bad Evening

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"GOOD MORNING CORPORAL," which William B. Friedlander presented last night at the Playhouse, is so inexpert, so unfunny, so mousy, that I can't think of much to say about it.

The plot is about a dumb little girl who, out of patriotism, marries every soldier, marine or sailor she finds drunk. She takes their money and gives it to the Red Cross or the USO, but the FBI doesn't know this and thinks she is running a racket.

Two of her husbands show up—an Air Forces corporal and a marine private—and spend two acts trying to get her into bed. Then a sailor husband shows up. I never did find out what happened to him.

Russell Hardie plays the marine, Joel Marston the corporal, Charita Bauer the girl and Frances Tannehill the girl's friend.

Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck are the authors. I wonder if they spend their spare time drawing mustaches on pretty girls in subway posters.

NEW YORK SUN
August 9, 1944

'Good Morning, Corporal,' Silly Farce, Opens the Season at the Playhouse

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE PLAYHOUSE, pride of William A. Brady for these many years and now under new management, emerged from its summer's slumber last evening with the presentation of a new comedy, "Good Morning, Corporal." The occasion was not auspicious. All concerned should have known better.

"Good Morning, Corporal," written by Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck, and presented by William B. Friedlander, is a silly and hasty farce about the marital adventures of one Dottie Carson, an addict of patriotism. She blithely gets herself married to three young men in the service—an Army corporal, a private of the Marines and a sailor. It's just after she has become the bride of the corporal that the Marine and the sailor return to claim her.

Well, when three acts are done and the complications and illegalities have been straightened out, it's Dottie's marriage with the third husband that sticks. Corporal Rourke gets the headache.

Much of the dialogue runs to ribaldry and labored gags, the acting is on the clamorous side, the direction is routine, and it is all, I suspect, a mistake.

There are six players in the cast and every one has appeared on Broadway in a previous production or so. Most of them have done creditable work in the past, but none appears to advantage in the new Playhouse comedy.

So "Good Morning, Corporal," comes to the stage that has been given over to such estimable projects as "The Show-off," "The Man Who Came Back" and the prize-winning "Street Scene." There will be no prizes for last nights exhibit.

Put it down as a striving and uneasy farce, an August cripple. The Playhouse will try again and will have better luck. It could hardly have worse.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 9, 1944

New Comedy At Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

"GOOD MORNING CORPORAL," a new comedy by Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck, opened last night at the Playhouse.

Russell Hardie, Charita Bauer, Joel Marston, Frances Wilson are included in the cast of the play, which was produced and staged by William B. Friedlander.

The single setting, an apartment in New York City, was designed by Robert Barnhart.

A comedy in three acts, "Good Morning Corporal" concerns the marital mix-ups of a girl from Washington, D. C. After her third marriage, involving an Army Corporal, she finds her two previous husbands—a Marine and a sailor—both erroneously reported killed in action, are very much alive.

NEW YORK POST
August 9, 1944

'Good Morning, Corporal' Induces A Gentle Nausea at the Playhouse

By WILELLA WALDORF

"GOOD MORNING, CORPORAL," the farce produced by William B. Friedlander last night at the Playhouse, is a collaborative effort by Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck. Mr. Gropper has been writing shows for years, but this is a first dramatic effort by Mr. Shalleck, who happens to be a lawyer. There ought to be a law against plays like "Good Morning, Corporal."

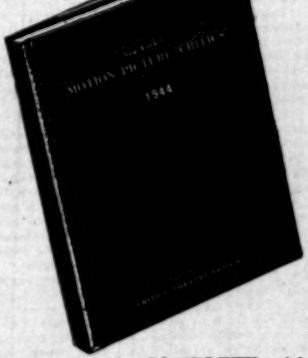
The plot concerns a mentally deficient young woman named Dottie Carson, who goes about marrying helpless service men when they are too drunk to remember anything. A play about such a racket might conceivably develop at least a glimmer of interest, but Dottie is not even a racketeer. She is just a patriot who pines to do her bit to win the war, so she takes the money she gets from her husbands and gives it to the Red Cross, Army and Navy Relief or the USO.

"After all," she prattles, "we're all serving Uncle Sam."

All of this is supposed to be perfectly harmless since each of the husbands is sent overseas before the honeymoon.

For three clumsy acts the authors struggle frantically to distribute as many gags as possible among the six actors, most of whom are called upon to undress, dress and undress again with depressing regularity. Nightgowns, pajamas, undershirts and beds are almost continually in evidence, and every now and then the heroine pokes her head out from under the covers and chirps to one of the husbands, "I'm Dottie!" Whereupon he grins oafishly and replies, "You certainly are!"

As far as we recall before everything went black, the only man on the premises that Dottie didn't manage to marry was a nice old fellow who just puttered around like a mixture of Mr. Fix-It and Santa Claus and who turned out to be from the FBI. If J. Edgar Hoover ever happens to see this show, both of the authors will probably be disbarred.



All the information you need right at your finger-tips

New York Motion Picture Critics' Reviews

Indispensable to producers, casting directors, writers, exhibitors. Invaluable as a lasting record of the stars and their pictures.

You, too — Want to keep informed!

Theatre and circuit owners, bookers and publicity men throughout this country and Canada inform us that these reviews are most helpful. In this form they are able to get the opinions of not one, but EIGHT critics; each writing independently of the other; each writing from the viewpoint of the millions of readers of his or her newspaper. Publicity departments will find these reviews a valuable source for new and original material.

Every week the COMPLETE criticisms exactly as they originally appeared in eight great New York newspapers will be sent you ready to be inserted in the beautiful 1944 blue cover.

"Catherine Was Great"

Play by Mae West; staged by Roy Hargrave; settings by Howard Bay. Presented by Michael Todd at the Shubert Theatre, August 2, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 3, 1944

Mae West Wasn't

By HOWARD BARNES

MAE WEST returned to Broadway last night, decked out like a battleship in a swimming pool. Her producer, Michael Todd, has spared no expense on trappings. Whether she is taking the handsome Prince Potemkin into her boudier, or making fugitive passes at her guards, the actress-author is dressed and framed in splendor. Since her script is incredibly boring and monotonous, and her acting is more limited than ever, nothing even approaching an entertainment emerges in "Catherine Was Great." Perhaps some musical interpolations might have saved the dramatic debacle at the Shubert. As it stands, it sets a new low for taste, wit, illusion or what you will, at the very outset of a season.

* * *

For "Catherine Was Great" is very bad indeed. In a prologue and eleven scenes it manages to get across the idea that the celebrated Empress of Russia liked the boys no end. Playing no favorites, she gives her favors to a general who burns the Turkish fleet, a peasant rebel, the imprisoned Ivan, who had a claim to the throne, and almost any other fellow whom she thinks is "solid and sensational." When it comes down to lines, stage business or a bit of dramatic meaning, the offering adds up to no more than a solo fashion parade of an undulating stage veteran, surrounded by pretentious physical and human props.

* * *

There is no reason to suppose that a sprightly historical burlesque might not have been devised by casting Miss West as Catherine the Great. It would have required a bit of composition and imagination. The present show has almost none. The constant reappearance of the star in a variety of gaudy costumes with a variety of musical comedy lovers is scant excuse for a "spectacle without music," as the production has been termed. There are a few aggressively off-color scenes, including one that involves the court tailor in a swishing routine, but from any salacious standpoint the piece is well out of the money.

* * *

It is unfortunate, of course, that so much theatrical substance has been wasted on such tripe as "Catherine Was Great." The Howard Bay settings are generally excellent and the costumes are not bad. Philip Huston, Charles Gerrard, Joel Ashley and the other actors who frame Miss West's flamboyant entrances and exits do their best to give the work a bit of comedy or conviction. The old Mae West delivery, without anything to deliver, stops the production in its tracks at every turn of what might generously be called a plot. The new show at the Shubert is ornamental, expensive and awful.

NEW YORK POST
August 3, 1944

'Catherine Was Great' Offers Very Few Laughs Even With Mae West in It

By WILELLA WALDORF

CATHERINE II was Empress of Russia for thirty-four years and Mae West's historical drama, "Catherine Was Great," seemed easily that long as it was lavishly launched by Michael Todd last night at the Shubert Theatre. In a prologue and twelve lush scenes, Miss West goes into the public and a private career of the celebrated Empress with a thoroughness that is exhausting.

Historians tell us that although Catherine's love affairs were the talk of Europe, she was a stickler for ceremony and decorum at court. Miss West, who has obviously been reading up on Russian history with a book in both hands, sees to it that the Empress sounds very toney. She says "fontostic," pronounces "can't" with a broad "a," and remarks that this is a "hoppy, hoppy day." And when one of her counsellors of state reminds her that "They also serve who only stand and wait," she smiles regally and replies: "Quoting Milton's pome, I presume!"

The large first-night audience, which had patriotically purchased war bonds so that it could buy tickets, was all ready to break into a guffaw at the drop of a Westian eyebrow, but there was surprisingly little opportunity for raucous laughter. The actress-author undulated about the imperial boudoir in her familiar hippy fashion; she eyed one handsome officer after another and invited him in a not too queenly manner to come up and see her sometime, and occasionally she got off a fairly amusing crack in the old-time style.

Heavily Historical

But no one should attend "Catherine Was Great" under the delirious impression that it is going to be a mixture of "Diamond Lil" and "Star and Garter" with a Russian accent, just because Mae West wrote and acts it, and Michael Todd has given it a production that makes the average Broadway musical show look drab.

"Catherine Was Great" is overdone from every point of view. Basically it is uninspired historical drama of the cloak and sword school, neither good enough to challenge attention in its own field, nor bad enough to be as funny as Mr. Todd presumably thinks it is. We felt downright sorry for that eager audience sitting on the edge of its seat last night perishing for a good loud laugh while Mae West, wearing a series of stunning imperial robes, with jeweled headdresses to match, discussed the impending war with Turkey around her council-table, or elegantly dashed off impressive documents of state with a quill pen while her Prime Minister stood by with the Imperial seal. Now and then she even considered freeing the serfs.

Of course the Empress received a number of handsome officers in her private apartment with monotonous regularity, and when a knock sounded on the door, ejaculated "Enta!" with devastating gentility. But "Catherine Was Great," any way you look at it, is heavy going, and it wasn't helped last night by the fact that a number of players, including Miss West herself, often seemed a little uncertain as to just what they were supposed to say next. Not that it mattered particularly.

Canned music was dispensed by via loud speaker at intervals, drowning out everything but its own blatant voice. The only music uncanned was contributed by Miss West herself disguised as a peasant. Before trapping a crude fellow who dared to lead a revolt against her rule, she proceeded to sing a song beginning "He must be strong, solid and sensational." It was not sensational.

"Catherine Was Great," in fact, struck us as a Michael Todd stunt that doesn't come off. He and Miss West would have done better to let the Imperial Russians alone and revive "Diamond Lil."

THE CAST

(IN THE PROLOGUE)

Jim	Hubert Long
Mike	Robert Strauss
Greg	Philip Huston
Roy	Mischa Tonken
Corporal Joe	Joel Ashley

Soldiers: Milton Gordon, Carl Benson, Jack Burke, John Colby, Boyd de Brossard, Antony Fortune, Eddy Grove, William Skelton, Carl Specht.

(IN THE PLAY)

Count Nikolai Mirovich	Coburn Goodwin
Capt. Dronsky	Philip Cary Jones
English Ambassador	Henry Vincent
Ambassador Choiseeul	Owen Coll
Ambassador Murad Pasha	Don de Leo
Capt. Danilov	Don Gibson
Alexis Orloff	Hubert Long
Count Panin	Charles Gerrard
Chief Chamberlain	John Stephen
Gregory Orloff	Philip Huston
Catherine II	Mae West
Prince Potemkin	Joel Ashley
Varvara	Elinor Counts
Florian	Ray Bourbon
Lieut. Bunin	Gene Barry
Marshal Suvorov	William Malone
Ivan VI	Michael Bey
Pugacheff	Bernard Hoffman
Innkeeper	Harry Bodin
Maurice	Leon Hamilton
Semyonev	Victor Finney
Vanya	Frank Baxter
Chimneysweep	Lester (Red) Towne
Chechkofski	Dayton Lummis
Page boys	Huddy and Dickie Millard

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 3, 1944

Catherine Was Great Is Spectacular but Uneven

By BURTON RASCOE

SHADES of Max Reinhardt and Morris Gest! The Michael Todd historical extravaganza, Catherine Was Great, by Mae West and starring Mae West, which opened at the Shubert last night before an audience which had bought $4,000,000 worth of War Bonds in order to purchase tickets, makes Chu Chin Chow and The Miracle, in retrospect, seem like productions of the late lamented Federal Theatre Project of WPA. It is a spectacle of almost unbelievable magnificence in the way of sets and costumes.

Unfortunately, as it stands, Catherine Was Great, is about as weak in substance, as deficient in sparkle, as were Chu Chin Chow and The Miracle. Except for what seemed to me an irrelevant, tasteless and highly artificial prologue, the show (last night) was continuously interesting without being exciting; it had inherent comedy that was only partially realized; it had the stuff of rich Rabelaisian gusto that was largely killed, I think, by faulty stage direction and one of the worst cases of "first night freeze" I ever saw a cast afflicted with.

Mae West Blows Lines

Miss West blew her lines half a dozen times and usually at an awkward moment for this to occur; and, thoughout the evening, she was utterly without that assurance which is almost her trade-mark and which the part she has written for herself demands. I am sure that Miss West will quickly regain her aplomb, but her stage fright last night must have been excruciating; for part of the time she spoke and moved like a somnambulist.

When the star is seized with "first night freeze," usually the whole cast catches it. Last night was no exception. Nearly every principal muffed his lines at one time or another. This, and some minor mishaps, such as the parting of a curtained backdrop in a dark conspiracy scene, which revealed a stagehand in shirt sleeves busily at work with his back to the audience and unaware for some time that he was thus visible, and the failure of the amplifiers for the records of incidental music to be properly modulated, all contributed to an audience response that was far from enthusiastic.

It would appear that neither the play nor the cast was ready for Broadway. But once the production gets running smoothly, more wit is injected into the text and some directions are altered in the interest of tempo, this gorgeous spectacle should settle down into a long, happy run. The static quality it had last night, which made it faintly reminiscent of the old tableaux of "living sculpture," should easily be replaced with a kinetic quality; for the story is a sort of earthy and ribald version of a yellow-back chronicle of The Life and Loves of Catherine the Great, with Miss West as Catherine.

Monotony of Mood

If I may make a suggestion to Miss West, she should vary her mood and manner of slow, sultry, banked-fire carnality with moods of imperious wrath and decision or with moods of any other sort; for that "come-up-and-see-me-sometime" stuff gets very monotonous after a half-hour or so, and, moreover, fails to make any of Catherine's other than amorous qualities at all apparent. Miss West's languid diction and movements, unvaried as they are, seriously impair the whole effect of the spectacle; for the others must pace their speech and action in key with hers and this makes their lines sound even more stilted than they are written.

Ray Bourbon (as a comical swish dress designer), Michael Bey (as Ivan II) and Don Gibson (as Captain Danilov, mostly in pantomime) were the only supporting players who showed to any advantage last night; but as the stage fright wears off, Charles Gerrard, Joel Ashley and William Malone should be very good. Playgoers are hereby warned the play is not a musical and what little humor it has depends upon sexual references that are amusing but unsubtle. It is Russian history as Miss West conceives it to be in terms of Mae West the Great—in settings of barbaric opulence by Howard Bay.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 3, 1944

Mae West Gives History The O-O in Lavish 'Catherine Was Great'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE spectacle of Mae West attacking the subject of Catherine II of Russia, both as historian and impersonator, would be something imposing, like the Taj Mahal or a fireworks version of "The Ruin of Pompeii," even if it had been done on a bare stage.

Last night the impetuous and pecunious Michael Todd presented Miss West and her "Catherine Was Great" at the Shubert Theatre amid such slavic splendors as only Howard Bay could bring into being. The result is an overpowering whatnot, a curio; a spectacle having the solemn majesty of the simultaneous launching of a dozen Iowa Class battleships. I am afraid it will be a bust, which will give Miss West one more than she needs.

It has long been known that Mae West, the actress, has curves, and her long absence from stage and screen seems not to have impaired them. Last night it became apparent that Mae West, the playwright, also has curves—curves, billows, swells, swirls and curlicues.

Not All for Laughs

Her prose has the pomp of the changing of the guards ceremony at Buckingham Palace. She and the cast of 50 or 60 with whom she has surrounded herself speak in prose which is not only measured but also weighed; and when, as empress, she commands a varlet, "Get me a traveling case and my peasant disguise"—then, oh boy, you know she is cooking on the front burner.

This come up and see me some time biography of the Empress of all the Russians, played as hoke drama, could have provided an evening's laughter in a simple Hoboken beer hall in prohibition nights. Even now there is some laughter in it, for Miss West's throaty manner of tossing away lines and her wonderful simplification of the subleties of sex are still effective.

But not all of "Catherine Was Great" is played for laughs. Not enough of it. Long stretches are cloak-and-sword melodrama, slowed by the necessity of giving Miss West every possible stellar advantage. Her every entrance is a parade, even when she comes in all by herself, which is not often.

The plot, as you can imagine, is a series of conquests—one or two of them military, the rest amatory. As Miss West said in a curtain speech to an audience which had given her a really warm personal welcome, "Catherine had 300 lovers. I did the best I could in a couple of hours." If she had, in the play, maintained the frame of mind of this speech, "Catherine" would have been better. But I think Mae has a notion that she is an actress, and also a playwright of some profundity.

Bay's Sets Superb

Under Roy Hargrave's direction, most of the well-subordinated other members of the cast talk and act like spear-carriers. There is some zip in Bernard Hoffman's playing of a rebel leader whom Mae seduces into captivity, and Ray Bourbon has two or three bits as an effeminate clothes-designer which are well done—if you care for swish humor. Joel Ashley, as Prince Potemkin, works with Mae in a bedroom scene.

Producer Todd has given "Catherine Was Great" everything. Mr. Bay's settings are perhaps the most beautiful he has done, and there are many of them. Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps have dressed not only the star but also the smallest walk-ons in rich and lovely fabrics. But producer Todd has also, I think, given Miss West her way—and that, I think, was a mistake.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 3, 1944

'Catherine Was Great' Has Mae West as Star

By ROBERT GARLAND

FOR three acts, 12 scenes and a prologue, "Catherine Was Great" revolves around the Royal Bed Chamber in the Winter Palace, St. Petersburg, 1762. From the pulling aside of the first curtain to the pulling back of the last, our on-stage Czarina is either in the Royal Bed Chamber, talking about the Royal Bed Chamber, thinking about the Royal Bed Chamber, or on her way there. Mae West must have stood in bed while writing the historical what-have-you Mike Todd fetched last night into the Shubert.

What's more, Mae West could have stood in bed last night while acting out her manuscript in the presence of a we-want-Mae-West, all-on-her-side congregation. It was a congregation that welcomed her with an ovation and urged her on to making a curtain speech at the end. Even during those final still-in-character words, Catherine, Ruler of all the Russias, was mentally bedridden. But in a virile, healthy sort of way! She'd done her best, said Mae. But her admirers must remember she'd only had two hours!

Best from Mike

Mike Todd, the producer of the piece, has given Mae West and Mae West's show the best that can be gotten. He has given it the direction of Roy Hargrave, not to mention some finishing touches of his own. He has given it the resplendent, if somewhat cluttery, backgrounds of Howard Bay. He has given it the ballet-like costumes of Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps. He has given it authentic Eighteenth Century furniture from the Newel Galleries. He has given it a gliding curtain, a revolving stage, a—

Well, he has given it everything you can think of, including a huge and handsome cast of nigh onto a hundred persons, ranging from Mae West as an Empress to John Frederick as a guard. Yet something is somewhere lacking. As the curtain glides back and forth; as the stage rolls round and round; as our Russian Wolf in Czarina's clothing gets man after man; as man after man is eaten alive and likes it, you wonder what on earth is the essential little thing that isn't there? It is, I think, a play.

Page Cap'n Jones

When you come to think about it, "Catherine Was Great" is a pageant rather than a play. Or, if it isn't a pageant, it's a smoking room joke dolled up in silks and satins. And with nowhere much to go. After you've been told about the bees, the birds and the flowers, the wolves, the monkeys and the rabbits, over and over again, you'd welcome a change of subject. They're times at the Shubert when you'd enjoy a less sex-conscious sort of man. John Paul Jones, for instance. Catherine liked him, too

There's no denying that "Catherine Was Great" works itself into a plotty sort of lather by the time the third act and the eighth scene — not counting the prologue — come along. But by then, not even melodrama can save the day—or play! The joke about Catherine, who was great with the boys, has gone too far. The folks out front just don't seem to care about the mysterious chimney-sweep and death in the secret room of Ivan VI. What they crave is a fresh joke to laugh at.

Most Mae West-ian

The players in 44th Street, hard by the Shubert Alley, give Mae West, the player, and Mae West, the playwright, the best that's in them. And that's all right! They wear what they're told to wear, say what they're told to say with every evidence of ardor. Each mother's son of them approaches the actress-empress with what used to be known as woman-than-death wrapped around him like a mantle. No other woman ever had so many passes made in her direction.

Among the bigger and better pass-makers are Joel Ashley as Prince Potemkin, Philip Huston as Gregory Orloff, Michael Bey as Ivan, Bernard Hoffman as Pugacheff, and half a dozen others whose names escape me in the name-filled, confusing program. And I hope it's Elinor Counts who is Catherine's charming hand-maiden . . . "Catherine Was Great" is Mae West at her most Mae West-ian, telling and retelling the gag about come-up-and-see-me-sometime in beautiful costumes against resplendent backgrounds. The trouble is, Mae West forgot to write Mae West a play.

NEW YORK SUN
August 3, 1944

'Catherine Was Great,' Cluttered Historical Drama, Opens at the Shubert

By WARD MOREHOUSE

DIAMOND LIL and the redoubtable Michael Todd have joined forces in the theater and the result of this collaboration is "Catherine Was Great," by and with Mae West, which opened last evening at the Shubert. As a spectacle the production represents time and money, and lots of both; as a play it misses badly. A wayward and tedious piece it is.

Miss West, back to Broadway after an absence of thirteen years, shows to better advantage as a performer than as a dramatist. Blond, buxom and serene, she now wears the dazzling raiment of a Russian empress. She is back with her poses and her posturings, her sly and knowing leers, her movements of eyes and hips, her shrugs and implicating sidewise glances. Her empress is ambitious and powerful, but is generally pictured as a ruler with more time for the boudoir than the affairs of state.

"Catherine Was Great" is told in a prologue, three acts and twelve scenes. The prologue is that of a U. S. O. recreation room—

time, the present. There is a flashback to St. Petersburg in 1762 and the time of Catherine and there follows the successive scenes that provide more pageantry than drama. These scenes bring in treachery, intrigue, rebellion and passing mention of victorious war with Turkey, and reveal an empress triumphant to the finish. And one in which the uninhibited ruler is never too busy for amatory adventures.

Miss West, always an actress of vitality, and one with an excellent sense of timing, struts through a play that seldom comes to life. Her seduction scenes are those which audiences are most likely to relish. She gets her best effects through the evening when the emphasis is on comedy and there are times when her amours come close to burlesque.

There is a company of stalwarts on the stage of the Shubert and good performances are provided by Joel Ashley, in the role of the ardent Potemkin; by Coburn Goodwin, Charles Gerrard, Bernard Hoffman and Philip Huston. It is a man's play in the scattered moments when Miss West is not taking over.

Michael Todd cuts loose on the production; he is as prodigal as ever. Howard Bay goes the limit with the settings of historical splendor, as do Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps with the costumes. Roy Hargrave has undoubtedly put in many hours with the direction, but for most of the way the traffic is slow and the going is heavy.

"Catherine Was Great" is lush and luminous. But it is unexciting as historical drama, cluttered and inexpert as a play.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 3, 1944

Mae West Slips On the Steppes

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MAE WEST did not have too bad an idea when she wrote *Catherine Was Great*, for she possesses at least one important affinity with the man-eating Empress of all the Russias. But the play itself is distinctly something else, and this morning the siren of sex lies self-slain by her own pen: She still has something to give and a way all her own; but her *Catherine*, loaded down with grandiose finery, sprawls through 13 scenes that either repeat the same Mae West joke or—what is far worse—take themselves seriously. Miss West may not have read enough Russian history to suit a scholar, but she has read far too much for the good of her play. It abounds in wars and insurrections, traitors and conspirators, and a beautiful hash they come to, you may believe me.

When Miss W. is being the self that made her famous, is swinging hips foremost about the stage, is delivering her ribald remarks with a kind of nasal grandeur, she can still be entertaining. She brings style to vulgarity and humor to suggestiveness. As manly and muscular Russians endlessly stream into her boudoir, she probably handles the little joke that brings them there as well as any one can; but the joke becomes decidedly monotonous. At the point where I had to rush out into the night, Catherine was still going ahead with her carnal conquests, though obviously a manpower shortage was looming.

Worse yet, Miss West wasn't content to play just the woman in Catherine; she chose to play the Empress as well. For this her qualifications were considerably less spectacular, and it doesn't help that she plays the part more than half seriously. Miss West taking thought about men is one thing; Miss West taking thought about "the people" is quite another. It is, in fact, just a rigmarole of dull, fancy words that sink the play into the depths of boredom.

Michael Todd has staged the show in a mighty splurge of semi-barbaric splendor. Howard Bay has done, with his tongue in his cheek, some gorgeously garish sets, and Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps have designed for Miss West a vast array of fleshly gowns—roughly, one to a lover. The huge cast, most of them amorous dummies, go through their boudoir work in good enough routine fashion. The two most famous lovers —Gregory Orloff and Prince Potemkin—are played with what dash the script allows by Philip Huston and Joel Ashley.

Miss West's Catherine was, as I said at the outset, not too bad an idea. But it should have been turned into a 15-minute blackout in a revue; and somebody else might better have written the script.

NEW YORK TIMES
August 3, 1944

Empress Mae

By LEWIS NICHOLS

MAE WEST has been a national disturbance for some considerable time. A few years ago she was writing Broadway plays and acting in them, and no one of the period could wave so nonchalant a hand from the rear of a police-patrol wagon. In the movies she was terrifically colossal. To the language she has given "Come up and see me sometime," and she, alone among the better actresses, has found her charms lending a slang name to life preservers. From 'way back it was inevitable that Mae one day would come to grips with Catherine the Great; all actors are potential Hamlets, and she obviously would be the Empress. What was not so inevitable was that she could do so spiritless a job as she has in writing "Catherine Was Great," in which she also appeared last evening at the Shubert.

Possibly the difficulty with her new show is that Mae has gone formal on us. Catherine did a lot for Russia and she had a lot of beaux, to use an old-fashioned term. As the authoress, Miss West has tried to blend history with a leer, to tell of the Empress' political activities as well as her sentimental ones. Broadway as of last night would have settled for more leer and less history; Mae is a rowdy, rousing person who has no business in court trappings and discussing the question of freedom for the serfs. Far too much of "Catherine Was Great" is a dull bore, heavily written and heavily handled; long scenes appear to have no end whatsoever.

Having made a household word of Sex, Miss West also has been content to rest on former laurels in that connection. While Catherine's contributions to Russian advancement turn out in the play to be stuffy talk, Catherine in the chamber is repetitious. Miss West belabors the idea of the Empress and all the handsome young men until the joke has gone ragged; if anyone might have been expected to give Sex a bit of streamlining, that person was Mae. Possibly no more can be said on the subject, but last evening's mistress of ceremonies should not have gone over and over the same old lines. They will be taking "come up and see me" from the language if this sort of thing keeps on.

* * *

Caught in the evil misfortune of her own contriving, Miss West as the actress does not come off too well. Her ways are of course well known. She has that smirk, that husky voice and what would be called a sinuous wriggle if she had not raised it to an art form. She makes an entrance in the play which is wonderful. But no amount of the come-hither wink can disguise the fact that, once the entrance is over, Miss West must settle down to some pretty dreary business, and she does not succeed in carrying the weak places of the show. As colleagues she has such players as Philip Huston, Joel Ashley and Michael Bey, as well as a great many more court selectees; but on Mae herself, the play must stand or fall—and it falls.

The hero of the evening undoubtedly is the designer of the court of Catherine the Great, Howard Bay. He has contributed a sheaf of picturesque settings worthy of a much better cause. The costumes, with Mae in a different one each scene, are colorful; when Mike Todd produces a show, he gives it the works. In this case the trappings surround emptiness.

"School for Brides"

Comedy by Frank Gill, Jr., and George Carleton Brown; staged by Harold Morton; settings by Ernest Glover. Presented by Howard Lang at the Royale Theatre, August 1, 1944.

NEW YORK SUN
August 2, 1944

'School for Brides,' Labored Farce, Opens at Royale as Season's Play No. 1

By WARD MOREHOUSE

BROADWAY'S new theatrical season got off to a sorry start last evening with the presentation at the Royale of a new farce, "School for Brides," a trite and labored contrivance that concerns the quest of a much-married millionaire for wife No. 7. The town needs new plays, but they must be better than this one.

"School for Brides," fashioned by Frank Gill Jr. and George Carleton Brown, is a West Coast product. There it was conceived, written, sold, financed, cast and produced, and taken to several cities. Now, after a stopover in what appears to have been a rather hospitable Chicago, it is brought into the Forties by Howard Lang. There was scant enthusiasm for it last night at the Royale; none at all from E 114.

This new farce brings along Roscoe Karns in the role of Mr. Hasty, who invests $100,000 in the bridal school, and with the result that he wins the girl who makes onion sandwiches and who understands him. There is a steady

THE CAST

Charlie	John Sheehan
Stephen Garrett	Charles Gary
Julie	Yolande Donlan
Diane	Frances Charles
Alice	Mary Best
Joanne	Olivia Russell
Leslie	Elizabeth Worthington
Grace	Darby Moore
Jeff Connors	Warren Ashe
Stephanie	Lucia Carroll
Ronnie	Joan Webster
Susan	Kay Lawrence
Vicki	Shirley Whitney
Frederick M. Hasty	Roscoe Karns
Dean Baxter	Bernadene Hayes
Mary	Ann Turner

parade of pretties across the stage of the Royale, and they're generally unclad, but it's readily apparent that most of the cover girls enrolled in Jeff Connors's Long Island sex course are there because of face and form and not acting ability. The playing in the Gill-Brown comedy is generally of the level of the writing, which isn't inspired.

The quizzical Mr. Karns, however, could be quite funny with better material and Bernadene Hayes frequently reveals a competence notwithstanding script handicaps. Mr. Karns, recruited from the screen, has appeared in more pictures than you ever saw. Miss Hayes is to be remembered from "Blind Alley." She played for months in Chicago in "Good Night, Ladies," which Mr. Lang has warily kept on tour. But I suspect that its chances locally would be better than those of last night's exhibit.

It's on the ribald side, this "School for Brides," written to be brazen and bawdy and with an eye on the easy-come, easy-go dollars of playgoers of the moment. It may have seemed funny in Seattle and points west, but as revealed in its premiere performance last evening it provides a long and dull evening in Forty-fifth Street.

Well, so much for play No. 1 of the theatrical year of 1944-45. "School for Brides" has been duly installed at the Royale. Tonight: Mae West.

NEW YORK TIMES
August 2, 1944

Expelled

by LEWIS NICHOLS

THERE are ten girls as scenic background of "School for Brides," which paused at the Royale last evening in headlong flight 'twixt Chicago and oblivion. In the first act they wear bathing suits and that brown paint. In the second act they wear sweaters for the first scene and nightgowns for second, and an audience which lingers will see them in lounging pyjamas after the final intermission. Howard Lang, who was co-producer of the fabulous "Good Night Ladies" in the Windy City, obviously thinks it is a male world here too, but on his own as the producer of August's first show, he apparently has forgotten that Broadway has standards. Sometimes they aren't high, but they are out of reach of "School for Brides."

Frank Gill Jr. and George Carleton Brown are the authors, and it has been their whim to describe the antics of a much-married man who is seeking his seventh wife. A promoter persuades him to back a school for training wives, he to marry the valedictorian. Classes go on mainly in bedrooms, and there are strange didoes involving the promoter's wife, an actress who falls in love with the much-married man and a comic butler. "School for Brides" is tedious and dull, telegraphing the imminent arrival of each bad joke by the ripple of its sweaters, then leering as the joke passes soundlessly by. Roscoe Karns of the screen plays the leading role, showing a personality which might be pleasing under circumstances less determinedly unhappy, and Bernadene Hayes is the actress who becomes wife No. 7. This does not constitute a good notice for "School for Brides;" this is a warning.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 2, 1944

Boredom in the Bedroom

By HOWARD BARNES

FOR the records, a new season started last night at the Royale Theater. For your information, the inaugural offering was far from auspicious. "School For Brides" is a supposedly heady bedroom farce, but it has very little sparkle. Roscoe Karns has come on from Hollywood, to be sure, to lend a quaint comic touch to the proceedings. There are dancing girls, in a profusion of negligees and bathing suits, and the plot is highly geared for innuendo. The trouble is that neither the humor nor the feminine curves are calculated to raise your temperature an iota even on a hot August evening.

* * *

About the best that can be said for this stage mishap is that it keeps trying hard through five stanzas. The players know their lines. The direction keeps them revolving in one manner or another through assorted antics. As a matter of fact, one scene virtually dispenses with dialogue as the nymphs leap in and out of bed in a sort of matrimonial derby. Frank Gill Jr. and George Carleton Brown have been less concerned with play-writing than flip quips. If they had studied up on Captain Billy's "Whizbang" they might have found richer material for laughter.

* * *

The puns that are pulled at the Royale are as tasteless as the plot that sustains them. I doubt very much that the inveterate first-nighter whose amorous adventures are celebrated in the show could find it amusing. It is one thing to frame a comedy about a millionaire who is forever being taken for a ride in his marital arrangements with chorus girls and models. It is another to cast the idea in a truly farcical mood. The authors have failed dismally. Karns and the girls work hard against insuperable odds.

* * *

If you know your movies, you will remember that the head man in the piece is an accomplished comedian and pantomimist. To his great credit, he portrays the part of the marrying playboy affably, even when he has to handle some embarassing business. Warren Ashe plays straight as the promoter who establishes the seminary of the title and John Sheehan does what he can with an anomolous butler role. Frances Charles, Yolande Donlan and the other babes who frisk through "School for Brides" are comely, but their physical charms are far more apparent than their acting talents. It is a fitting time for farce, but it should be funnier than it is at the Royale.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 2, 1944

'School for Brides' Is a Primer in Sex for Backward Audiences

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE constant yawp of cultural centers west of the North River is that Broadway neither knows nor cares what goes on in the theatres of the rest of the country. It is insular, haughty and blind. Last night's premiere of "School for Brides" probably will widen this rift in Mr. Roosevelt's union of States, for a play which was well received in Stockton, Calif.; Sacramento, Calif.; San Francisco, Calif.; Vancouver (out of bounds in B. C.), Seattle, Wash., and Chicago, Ill., looks like an ill-carved hunk of cheese when displayed locally.

Perhaps it is our fault, here in the New York theatre. Perhaps we do not, in our innocence, appreciate the subtlety of the bedroom joke, the music in the cry of the lonesome wolf, the art involved in young ladies clad in night dresses and booster bosoms. Maybe we don't know what sex is, and are so dumb we can't understand it when it is dumped on us with bulldozers.

Man from Hollywood

"School for Brides," fresh from a reputedly triumphant ten weeks in Chicago, has opened the 1944-1945 theatrical season. This could just as well be a typographical error and the dates could be 1904-1905, for the farce is thin, obvious, artificial and slowly paced. Its one asset is Hollywood's Roscoe Karns, who has a friendly manner and works hard. But I'd rather have seen Mr. Karns in "Nothing But the Truth" or "It Pays to Advertise."

Roscoe plays a character rather familiar to Broadway night life—an ageing millionaire playboy who keeps on marrying and paying off wives. An opportunist operator of a model agency changes his agency into a school for brides, so that a number of handsome wenches on the make may be educated in the business of trapping Mr. Karns, and one of them will become Mrs. K. No. 7.

Very, Very Moral

There are bedroom scenes as well as bedroom jokes, and one or two of the jokes are funny if you have forgotten Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang and College Humor. But the play is old stuff, in construction as well as in humor. It is, of course, very moral, for in the end a woman who will make a real, good wife gets the prize, and all the wenches who are wearing what Hollywood technicians call Henleys are left in the lurch.

Bernadene Hayes, a blonde who wears the longest artificial eyelashes I ever saw, plays the woman who will make a real, good wife. The veteran John Sheehan is around as a farce-comedy butler, Warren Ashe plays the bridal school operator and there are a number of girls in the cast with lots of legs and things.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 2, 1944

Sex Takes A Setback

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

APPARENTLY on the theory that Broadway had gone too long without an opening, Howard Lang brought a sex farce known as *School for Brides* to the Royale on Tuesday night. He brought it from Chicago, where it managed to run for some weeks without being overtaken. Chicago, I fear, is getting careless.

Mr. Lang's little offering seems to go on the assumption that sex is so beguiling it can even lend charm to imbecility. Both the plot of *School for Brides* and the general behavior of its characters go beyond what farce will license or the human mind can dope out. At the same time, its technique for getting laughs is just to throw one stupefying double-entendre after another; I don't think I've heard them come so fast or fall so flat since divers school mates and I tried at 15 to sound like men of the world.

The unduly complicated plot centers in a six times married millionaire playboy. He is roped into putting up $100,000 to found a school for training good-looking girls as brides, on condition that he himself can marry the "valedictorian." We needn't go into the girls' homework.

Some of the girls in the school *are* good-looking; and Roscoe Karns (as the playboy), Warren Ashe, Bernadene Hayes, Ann Turner and others go through their parts blamelessly enough. But the play, beyond its other shortcomings, is far oftener silly than sultry.

Well, tonight Broadway moves on to loftier and more spiritual things, with Mae West back among us.

NEW YORK POST
August 2, 1944

'School for Brides' Opens the New Theatrical Season With a Dull Thud

By WILELLA WALDORF

SINCE "School for Brides," which opened the new Broadway theatrical season last night at the Royale Theatre, is